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ABSTRACT

This three-part study uses Afrocentric theory and a multidimensional method to synthesize and apply selected theories and research presented in the past two decades to define and address the broad instructional needs of African-American children. The overall educational impact of this social and cultural movement was assessed by extracting Afrocentric paradigms, identifying common cultural and aesthetic references, and determining whether there was an increasing Afrocentric consciousness in post-1960s creative and pedagogical literature. In the second part of the study, common Afrocentric paradigms were drawn from literature that offer prescriptions for addressing educational needs and "saving the African American child." These paradigms were subsequently translated into questions to be used as guidelines for evaluating and teaching black literature to elementary and secondary school students. Following the second and third chapters, which present overviews of the African-American literacy tradition and the evolution of Afrocentric literature for children, instructional models are appended for each instructional level. Grade-appropriate books by African-American authors were analyzed using Afrocentric paradigms as guidelines. Finally, each author was "located" to determine his or her historical, cultural, and geographical centrism. Appendixes contain a 108-item bibliography and lists of authors and recommended books for each instructional level. (GLR)

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NEW VISIONS OF A LIBERATED FUTURE: AFROCENTRIC PARADIGMS, LITERATURE, AND A CURRICULUM FOR SURVIVAL AND BEYOND

A Dissertation
Submitted to
the Temple University Graduate Board

in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Carolyn Louise Holmes

May, 1993

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ABSTRACT

NEW VISIONS OF A LIBERATED FUTURE: AFROCENTRIC PARADIGMS, LITERATURE, AND A CURRICULUM FOR SURVIVAL AND BEYOND

by Carolyn L. Holmes
Doctor of Philosophy
Temple University, 1993

Major Advisor: Dr. Kariamu Welsh-Asante

Throughout the past two decades the educational status of the majority of African American youth has been described in dire terms. In spite of numerous studies and efforts to address the problems which resulted from the continued "mis-education" of African American youth, few significant improvements or plans to address these problems have been offered. In an attempt to move beyond the mere delineation of negative statistics and assessments, this dissertation was designed as a functional model which includes a prescription for constructive change.

This three-part study utilizes Afrocentric theory and a multi-dimensional method to synthesize and apply selected theories and research presented in the past two decades to define and/or address the broad instructional needs of African American children.

Literature from diverse fields published following the Black Power/Black Arts Movement in the United States was examined in the first part of the study. The overall educational impact of this broad-based social and cultural movement was assessed by extracting Afrocentric paradigms, identifying common cultural and aesthetic references, and determining whether there was an increasing Afrocentric consciousness in post-sixties creative and pedagogical literature.

In the second part of the study, common Afrocentric paradigms were drawn from literature which offers prescriptions for addressing the educational needs and "saving the African American child". These paradigms were subsequently translated into questions to be used as guidelines for evaluating and teaching Black Literature to the elementary (k-4th grade), middle (5th-8th grade), and secondary (9th-12th grade) student.

Following the second and third chapters which present overviews of the African American literary tradition and the evolution of Afrocentric literature for children, instructional models were included in chapters for each instructional level. Grade-appropriate books by prize-winning African American authors, Eloise Greenfield, Walter Dean Myers, Zora Neale Hurston, and James Baldwin, were analyzed using Afrocentric paradigms as guidelines.

Finally, each author was "located" to determine his or her historical, cultural, and geographical centrism. Selected bibliographies, authors, and recommended books for each instructional level were included in the appendices.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ABSTRACT iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS vi

LIST OF FIGURES xii

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION 1

    Statement of the Problem 14
    Subproblems 15
        1) Instructional Application 15
        2) Varying Instructional Levels 16
    Significance of the Study 16
    Research Precedent 19
    Research Method 22
    Limitation of the Study 27
    Definition of Terms 29
    Notes 32
    Figure 1.
        Holmes Afrocentric Paradigm Model as Literary Indicators 33

2. LITERATURE REVIEW 34

    General Responses to the Educational Status and Needs of African American Children 34
    Collective Responses from the African American Community 51
    Conclusion and Summary 66

3. EVOLUTION OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERARY TRADITION 70

Page

Introduction 70
Old World Traditions Shape New World Reality 72

American "Plantation" Literature 73
In Their Own Words: African American Folklore, Poetry, Essay and Biography 81
The Harlem Renaissance (1919-1929) 95
From Depression Years to the Civil Rights Era 108

4. AN OLD TRADITION, A NEW CHALLENGE: AFROCENTRIC LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN 121

In The Beginning 121
Early Leadership Emerges 125
Foot soldiers in the Struggle 135
Education Agenda of the Civil Rights Movement 137
From Civil Rights to Black Power 138
Spread of Afrocentric Consciousness 141
New Directions for the 70's 159
Black Women Writers of Adolescent Literature in the 80's........ 162
Notes 170

5. ELOISE GREENFIELD: STRONG VOICE FOR BLACK CHILDREN 171

Introduction 171
"Locating" Eloise Greenfield 174
The Early Years 176
New Career and Biographies for Children 180
Picture Books for the Young Child 185
Later writings and Poetry for Children 192

6. WALTER DEAN MYERS: THREE DECADES OF CELEBRATING BLACK CHILDREN 202

Introduction 202
Claiming a Legacy: Myers begins to Write Professionally 204

Page

The Early Years: Building a Reputation and a Career 207

Making a Living and Expanding Themes in the 80's 223
Continuing an Afrocentric Tradition in the 90's 241
Notes 246

7. BLACK LITERATURE FOR THE MATURE STUDENT AND INSTRUCTION IN UPPER SECONDARY GRADES 249

Introduction 249
Post-Sixties Curriculum Integration 254
Traditionalist Challenges to Curriculum of Inclusion 258
Rescuing and Reconstructing the African American Literary Tradition in the Secondary Grades 259
The Larry Neal Classics in African American Literature Instructional Approach 267
Reassessing African American Literature Through an Afrocentric Paradigm 270
Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God 272
James Baldwin Predicts The Fire Next Time 282
Notes 293

8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION 296
Need For Further Study 302

REFERENCES 304

APPENDICES

A. CORETTA SCOTT KING AWARD WINNERS 336

B. BLACK AUTHORS, ILLUSTRATORS, AND PUBLISHERS OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS 343

C. SELECTED BOOKS OF AFRICA FOR CHILDREN 347

Page

D. SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BLACK HISTORY AND CULTURE FOR MATURE READERS (Upper Secondary Grades and Adults) 353

E. THE LARRY NEAL CULTURAL SERIES CLASSICS IN AFRO-AMERICAN LITERATURE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF "GREAT" BOOKS 361

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

1. Holmes Afrocentric Paradigm Model Literary Indicators 33

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1969, African American psychiatrist Price Cobbs contributed an article, entitled "The Black Revolution and Education," to The National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin. Through this educational forum he attempted to address some of the many questions which had been posed concerning "the process by which the teacher and the school administrator now find themselves in the eye of an increasing storm since the Black Movement has rushed into the halls of academia" (p. 3). Three years earlier the official beginning of what has been termed "a Black Revolution" or a "Black Power Movement" had been witnessed when the new chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Stokely Carmichael, announced his organization's redirection from its traditional methods of nonviolent demonstrations and protests for civil rights denied to African American citizens for more than a century, by both law and custom. Carmichael challenged all "thinking" black folk to join SNCC in its quest for "**Black Power**"--a concept which spoke to the African American's desire for self-determination and nationhood, and the negation of an oppressive, race driven world reality. In essence, Carmichael was rejecting the integrationist tendency which had characterized the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's. In its place, he was advocating a nationalist tendency which would redefine both society and the world in Black images and interests (Karenga, 1982: 131). The responses to this challenge, emanating from all components of the African American community, were so dramatic that the social and cultural fabric of the United States was shaken to the very core of its European foundations (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967). The educational arena was merely one of several fronts used for launching attacks against the American establishment and its tradition of unequal and unjust treatment of black citizens.

On May 29, 1966, Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Chairman of the Committee on Education and Labor, had delivered the baccalaureate address to the graduating class at Howard University. He challenged the young graduates to seek black power by demanding **human,** rather than civil rights. One of the "God-given" human rights, he declared, was "the right to the finest education man's social order can provide. To demand these God-given human rights is to seek black power, what I call audacious power--the power to build institutions of splendid achievement". (Powell, 1966: 7)

Cobbs' subsequent analysis stressed the historic fact that African Americans had not just begun to demand educational change. This, he contended, had been an ongoing reality for more than 100 years. In 1968, when black students from colleges and universities to secondary and elementary schools confronted teachers, administrators, and policy-makers to demand an education that was more relevant to their lives and more supportive of their collective self-interest, they were merely following (albeit in a more forceful manner) the tradition established by past generations of African would be change-agents, such as Carter G. Woodson, who wrote his landmark work, The Miseducation of the Negro, in 1933, W.E.B. DuBois, author of Black Reconstruction in America 1869-1888 (1973), George Padmore, who published How Britain Rules Africa, in 1936, and reiterated by Walter Rodney, the late Guyanese scholar who wrote How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, in 1974.

Throughout the years many promises and pledges for educational improvement have been made, but little has actually been delivered from the majority-controlled institutions which shaped national education policy and practice. In spite of the availability, for more than a century, of the scholarly research necessary to document the creativity, contributions, and vast experiences of Africans and African Americans as a people in world history, the last decade of the twentieth century continues to witness attempts to "set the record straight," and to provide missing content that would enable teachers to weave an honest and comprehensive story of African peoples into the general school curriculum (Hilliard III, Payton-Stewart, and Williams, 1990).

Following his explication of the African American's century-long quest for quality education, and the continuing betrayal by those who controlled the nation's educational institutions, Cobbs concluded his analysis with a warning--unless the nation radically altered its character so that it reflected **all** of its citizens, not just white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, **its very survival** would be in jeopardy. The "storm" which had moved from the streets of America to the classroom and school yard was yet another reflection of the long-overdue need for positive change.

One of the most significant individuals who responded to Carmichael's challenge was Philadelphia-born poet, essayist, playwright, critic, editor and declared Black Nationalist, Larry Neal. Neal became the leading spirit of the **Black Arts Movement**, which he declared to be "the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept; and as such, it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America" (Neal, 1972: 257). It was ironic that Cobbs suggested that survival of the nation was at risk unless positive changes were made in the education of African American youth, for the advocates of the Black Power/Black Arts Movement, such as Carmichael, Addison Gayle, Malauna Karenga, and Larry Neal, were primarily concerned with the cultural and spiritual survival of African people in America (Neal, 1972), not the nation as a whole.

The weight of oppression and racism in America had become unbearable to many African Americans. The brutal violence continually inflicted upon peaceful protestors and demonstrators for social justice and political equality in the land of their birth, and finally, the bombing of innocent African American children while they attended Sunday school in Montgomery, Alabama, forced many black citizens to reject (at least for a while) the old ideas of integration, brotherhood, and American unity. The Black Arts Movement was perceived "as a corrective--a means of helping black people out of the polluted mainstream of Americanism, and offering logical, reasoned arguments as to why African American writers should not desire to join the ranks of a Norman Mailer or William Styron. To be an American writer is to be an American, and for black people, there should no longer be honor attached to either position" (Gayle, Jr., 1972: xxii).

In 1969, African American scholar James Turner outlined "the sociology of Black Nationalism" in an article for Black Scholar, and identified its essential theme as "a counter-movement away from subordination to independence, from alienation to refutation, to self-affirmation..." (Turner, 1969: 18). A little over a year later he continued to provide an analysis of this growing phenomenon by explaining some of the various forms among Africans in America which Black Nationalism had taken. Some of these variations included "Religio-Nationalism (Nation of Islam); Cultural Nationalism of Ron Karenga and Amiri Baraka; Marxist Revolutionary Nationalism of the Black Panther Party; Economic Nationalism of the Black Capitalism Adovocates; Political Nationalism of the Republic of New Africa; and Pan-African Nationalism of Brother Malcolm X" (p. 6). The common denominator of all variants, he contended, was the basic proposition that "all things created and occupied by Blacks should be controlled by Black people, and the purpose of every effort should be toward achieving self-determination" (Turner, 1971: 6-7).

By the mid-seventies the key issues and concerns which were first voiced by leaders of the Black Power/Black Arts Movement, such as the need for black liberation, group empowerment, and the necessity of defining and explicating the black aesthetic, had become evident in the pedagogical literature which reflected instructional issues and concerns identified by African Americans and other education change-agents. It was now quite clear that many of the so-called national educational issues, such as crime and school violence, which had emerged in the wake of the Black Revolution and were given so much attention by the federal government, national media, and other representatives of the establishment, were merely different aspects of the much larger problem--America's dual traditions of white racism and black powerlessness. The specific educational needs of African American children continued to be unaddressed, since they historically had not been viewed as important as the need for the establishment to maintain power and continue the status quo:

> The use of education as a tool to control black people continued as the prime model when slavery ceased... Where the police department has been a repressive force for keeping blacks in line, the educational establishment has been a tranquilizer for lulling them into a foolish sense of security. (Cobbs, 1969: 5)

The same year that Cobbs attempted to explain to educators the root causes of the social and cultural revolution which had spilled so unceremoniously into the halls of academia, Maulana Karenga, another leading voice during this period of social turmoil, offered a similar analysis of the American educational system, but stressed the traditional political roles which schools and universities have served:

> The educational institution has traditionally been, and is now, one of the institutions that the power structure maintains in order to reinforce its own position... What you have to understand is that you should not fool yourselves by thinking that education is an academic thing; it is basically a political thing, and it provides identity, purpose, and direction within an American context... If you are a white institution

> and blacks come in here, [speaking at Yale University] then the blacks come out "white," too, unless they have some different identity, purpose, and direction to shield them from all this. (Karenga, 1969: 37)

Larry Neal, Addison Gayle, Ron Milner, Hoyt Fuller, LeRoi Jones and other leaders of the Black Arts Movement were precursors of the theory of social change defined by scholars in recent years as **Afrocentricity,** which according to Molefi K. Asante, an early definer and prominent scholar in this theory, is grounded in a method which "pursues a world voice distinctly African-centered in relationship to external phenomena" (Asante, 1990: 8). Another scholar who wrote the introduction to Asante's first book which introduced the theory, provided the additional observations that "Afrocentricity is an uncovering of one's true self, it is the pinpointing of one's center and it is the clarity and focus through which black people must see the world in order to escalate. Maintenance and survival are no longer adequate terminology to pass on to the next generation" (Welsh, 1980: 3).

One of the demands made by African American youth who revolted against their schools in the late sixties and early seventies was for a relevant curriculum which included their **own** history, culture and literature, as an honest reflection of their rich African heritage. What these children and young adults were actually seeking was a curriculum that would release them from psychological captivity, and the psychological damage that slavery and post slavery racism imposed on black people (Jones, 1972).

Carmichael and Hamilton had been very explicit in their recommendations (more than two decades ago) for addressing the social problems threatening the lives of African American children:

> Black people in America have no time to play nice, polite parlor games--especially when the lives of their children are at stake... For Black people to adopt *their* methods of relieving *our* oppression is ludicrous. We blacks must respond in our own way, on our own terms, in a manner which fits our temperaments. The definitions of ourselves, the roles we pursue, the goals we seek are our responsibility. (1967: ix)

This kind of "liberating" curriculum for African American children (and all children) would not be possible unless the paradigms guiding the selection of appropriate instructional materials, as well as the methodology prescribed for teaching this material, evolved from a theoretical foundation and aesthetic which not only reinforced self-image, but the essence of one's collective or communal being as well. In the specific case of African American children, an Afrocentric theoretical foundation and the African aesthetic would best serve this objective. Only then could one say that the curriculum and the instructional method were designed to serve the educational needs of the African American child.

Although the Black Arts Movement, with its vision of art "speaking directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America," was a precursor of Afrocentric theory and the Afrocentric method as it has developed in recent years; the limiting nationalist tendency which characterized the Movement was not maintained in subsequent years. Unlike Black Nationalism, "the Afrocentric method seeks to transform human reality by ushering in a human openness to cultural pluralism which cannot exist without the unlocking of the minds for acceptance of an expansion of consciousness" (Asante, 1990: v). In this much broader and more humanistic intellectual vision, **survival** continues to be an important concern of theorists, but the overall survival of humanity replaces the more parochial concerns for the survival of only one race, culture or nation. In no way does the objective of using Afrocentric paradigms to enhance instruction for African American students negate the necessity for multiculturalism in the educational program of a pluralistic society; but unless one has a clear understanding and appreciation of self, it will be futile to attempt to teach understanding and respect for the history and culture of others. According to the historian C. Tsehloane Keto, "scholars dedicated to human survival can save future generations from grief by teaching the youth of the last decade of the twentieth century to appreciate the widespread talent, cultural innovativeness and rich intellectual diversity that exists among people who inhabit this planet" (Keto, 1990: 40).

The literature review which follows is a synthesis of the writings published in the years following the Black Power/Arts Movement (approximately 20 years) which address the educational status and/or needs of African American children. This literature includes the research and professional opinions of scholars from various fields, including education, psychology, sociology, political science, history, and literature. Collectively, it reflects several Afrocentric paradigms which have been translated into questions for use as guides in the evaluation and instruction of Black Literature to

African American students in elementary and secondary grades. These questions are as follows:

1) Does the author place Africa or African peoples at the center of his or her discourse? (Asante, 1987, 1989, and 1990)

2) Does the major theme of the work recognize or reward behavior which supports community or group interest rather than individual accomplishments and self-interest? Is the Black family presented in a positive manner? (Boateng, 1990; Karenga, 1989; and Neal, 1966)

3) Does the theme (or themes) directly or indirectly celebrate aspects of African/African American culture (i.e., language, music, art, dance, religion, mythology, folklore, etc.)? (Neal, 1989b; Boykin, 1983; and Asante and Welsh-Asante, 1990)

4) Does the work reflect or demonstrate components of the African aesthetic, i.e., call-and-response, multi-dimensionality, multi-rhythms, holism, etc.? (Thompson, 1966; Mbiti, 1970; and Welsh-Asante, 1993)

5) Are African/African American characters depicted as subjects rather than objects in the work? (i.e., Does the plot evolve from their own actions, rather than what is done to them by others?) (Asante, 1990)

6.) When male and female characters interact, is sexism avoided and sexual complementarity the normative relationship? (Keto, 1989; and Asante, 1990)

7) Are axiological issues (values) culturally distinct and important components of the central theme and/or plot? Are "good" and "beautiful" synonymous concepts in this work? (Neal, 1989b; Akbar, 1984; and Boykin, 1986)

8) Does the work help to address or answer cosmological issues, such as Why am I here? and How do I fit into the grand design of humankind, nature or with the Supreme Being? (Mbiti, 1970; and Richards, 1990)

9) Is the major character or group depicted in conflict or harmony with nature? (Asante, 1990; Mbiti, 1970; Richards, 1990; Boykin, 1986; and Diop, 1978)

10) Does spirituality have a positive role in the plot or tone of the work? Is there a spiritual component in the theme? (Richards, 1990; Boykin, 1986; Mbiti, 1970; and Karenga, 1984b)

11) Is the reality or worldview (present or historical) of the students acknowledged or reinforced in the work? (Karenga, 1984a; Irvine, 1990; Hale-Benson, 1985; Brooks, 1985; Karenga and Carruthers, 1986; and Boykin, 1986)

12) Does the work recognize or reflect cultural and individual differences without hegemonic attitudes, racism, classism or sexism? (Asante, 1987 and 1990; Anderson, 1988; Keto, 1989)

13) Is there an overall tone of victorious consciousness apparent in the work? (Neal, 1989b; Kunjufu, .1984; Brooks, 1985; Asante, 1987; Karenga, 1989; and Chinweweizu, 1977)

14) Is Ancient Egypt (Kemet) presented as a "classical" reference point for African history and culture? (Hilliard, 1985; Karenga and Carruthers, 1986; and Diop, 1974)

15) When the plot is historically grounded are incidents factual and are characters honestly portrayed? (Karenga, 1984a; Keto, 1989)

An exploration of these questions and the Afrocentric paradigms which suggested them may be used as the basis of lesson development--concepts, understandings or objectives. The analysis of answers to the questions will also support the evaluation process if an objective is to determine the relevance or value of individual literary works for supporting curriculum and instructional goals. Regardless of the race of the author or the subject matter addressed in the work, the work would not be considered Afrocentric if the answer to all or most questions above is negative. The more positive responses there are to these questions, the more

Afrocentric the particular literary work is. To the individual interested in eradicating educational deficits for African American children, the following questions should then be asked: Is the work appropriate or relevant as instructional material for African American youth? If the literature does not support the cultural, aesthetic, and/or educational interests of the intended audience (African American youth), whose interest does it serve? Why should this particular work be considered for use in the classroom?

As concerned educators evaluate the educational status of the majority of African American children at the dawn of the twenty-first century, and plan instructional programs for these students, a major objective must be to move beyond the mere determination of education deficits. These educators must also identify and articulate concrete instructional strategies and programs which will address the problems that have limited positive educational experiences and maximum growth and development for all African American children. Asante addressed this topic in Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge (1990), and challenged other scholars to also make this additional commitment in their work: "Africologists must critique, but also in our research we must propose concrete actions that lead to the lessening of disharmony, suffering, misunderstanding, and dislocation" (p. 193).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In this study I will determine whether or not specific issues raised during the Black Power/Black Arts Movement in the United States were subsequently reflected in pedagogical literature which addressed the educational status and specific instructional needs of African American children. To adequately make this determination two critical issues which were basic components of this social/political/cultural movement must also be addressed--**Afrocentric consciousness** and **cultural and aesthetic references.**

It will be necessary to determine if an increasing Afrocentric consciousness is present in the pedagogical literature of the past two decades which addressed the educational needs of African American children, since this issue of "looking within the African past and present ethos for answers to African American strengths" was viewed as a key component of the Movement's vision of black liberation and empowerment. One of the important directives given to the writers and other disciples of the the Black Arts Movement (including education change agents) by leaders such as Larry Neal, was the necessity "to carry the past and future memory of the race, of the nation, which represents our various identities and links us to the dependent, more profound aspects of our ancestry--we must remember that we are bearers of the ancient tribal tradition" (Neal, 1966: 7).

The cultural and aesthetic references infused in the post-60's pedagogical literature which offers prescriptions for African American children must also be determined if the full impact of the Black Power/Black Arts Movement is to be understood and assessed. This is true because the Black Arts Movement, as defined by Neal, was the "aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power Movement" (1989b: 62) If Neal's charge to the Black writer, "to purify by fire"[1] the old symbols, songs, myths, legends, and history that was the lost birthright of African people, had been accepted and acted upon, references to the African aesthetic (although possibly transformed or reconstructed) would be reflected in the pedagogical literature, as well as the creative literature which may be used in the classroom.

To Larry Neal and the other definers of the Movement, art was not merely for art's sake, as is postulated in Western thought. It was also political, and should be used to address the needs of the people. Following the model of a collective African world view, ethics would not be divorced from aesthetics, but must go hand and hand, and art is only ethical if it supports the people in their liberation/victory struggle (Neal, 1964, 1965, Feb. 1966, Jan. 1966, Oct. 1966 and April 1966).

SUBPROBLEMS

1) **Instructional Application** -

to determine how Afrocentric paradigms identified in selected pedagogical literature may be used as guides to enhance the instruction of creative literature for African

American (and other) elementary and secondary school students.

2) **Varying Instructional Levels -**
to determine if the Afrocentric paradigms, drawn from pedogogical literature and reflected in the previous 15 questions, will remain appropriate for each level of instruction--elementary (pre-K through 4th grades), middle (5th through 8th grades), and senior high school (9th through 12th grades); and if adjustments to the paradigms must be made, why would they be necessary, and what would these changes be?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

I will review, synthesize, and offer a model to address instructional issues, concerns and educational deficits for African American children which were identified in the wake of America's Black Power/Black Arts Revolution of the late 1960's and early 1970's; but were never resolved to the advantage of the children in question. Throughout the past two decades the educational status of the majority of African American youth has continued to be described in dire terms (i.e., Cobbs, 1969, Jones, 1972, Hilliard, 1983, Brooks, 1985, Mboya, 1986, Hale-Benson, 1986, Viadero, 1987, Sorrell, 1989, and Irvine, 1990). Although a review of pedagogical literature reveals that various problems and multiple suggestions for improving the education of African American children have been identified and repeatedly debated in the studies, reports, and educational forums which have taken place; very little has actually been done to eliminate these problems, and recommended prescriptions have largely been ignored (Melnick and Hall, 1986, Kunjufu, 1989, Irvine, 1990, Nobles, 1990, and Asante 1991b). This has resulted in an ongoing miseducation of African American children.

Some of the suggestions discussed in this literature include the following: improved text books (i.e., purged of racist myths, stereotypes, omissions and distortions); instructional programs and curricula designed to strengthen self-awareness and self-esteem; high teacher expectations; respect and understanding of students' culture; increased instructional and administrative role models; positive teacher-student interactions; and a broad multi-cultural consciousness grounded in centric consciousness.

Apparently knowing **what** needed to be done (i.e., include African American history, literature and culture in the curriculum; recognize the value and celebrate cultural differences in the school community and in the nation; expose negative myths, stereotypes, omissions and distortions in traditional textbooks and curricula; maintain high expectations for all children; and plan instruction with the needs of the child as the number one priority), was not enough. In spite of the efforts of various scholars and researchers, including those who support an Afrocentric approach (Hilliard, Boykin, Banks, Irvine, Asante, Akbar, and Ogbu), and many who appear to have been influenced by concepts and issues promulgated during and following the Black Power/Black Arts Movement; the **how** has remained largely a nebulous concept.

A review of the pedagogical literature covering the past two decades reveals a dearth of materials which specifically addresses the educational status of African American children and the inclusion of Black Literature in the curriculum. This includes specific instructional models, guides, and qualitative or quantitative empirical studies made available to educators who have the task of translating theory and research into effective teaching practice and methods to improve instruction. While various assessments of the problem have been made, it is my opinion that the mere repetition of dire statistics, and multiple pronouncements that our children (or the nation) are "at risk," will do nothing to "save the African American child," or change the historical and current miseducation which they face in the nation's classroom.

I begin the study by identifying key educational issues revealed in a general survey of pedagogical literature, including educational indexes, journals, books, articles, professional conferences and reports which are believed to have led to educational deficits for African American children. Secondly, I explore various proposals suggested in this literature for addressing these problems; and finally, one method, or instructional model, is offered for addressing these needs and education deficits through the identification and application of Afrocentric paradigms in the evaluation and instruction of Black Literature to elementary and secondary school students.

This study is a valuable asset to the general field of African American Studies for its objective is to apply Afrocentric theory and methodology, as it has been delineated in recent years, to an educational arena (the curriculum in elementary and secondary grades) often neglected in past studies (Melnick and Hall, 1986, and Hilliard, Payton-Stewart and Williams, 1990). The research also supports the general fields of elementary and secondary education by providing a stronger foundation for the development of instructional programs for African American children which do not repeat past errors, but builds upon the historical and cultural strengths of the students. The pedagogical literature of the past two decades reveals that an approach such as this one, to improve the educational status of African American children, has repeatedly been called for in the past and is still greatly needed today.

RESEARCH PRECEDENT

In 1974, Mildred Anderson Hill's doctoral dissertation, **The African Aesthetic, African American Literature, and the Teaching of English,** was completed at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Dr. Hill had chosen "selected aspects of the African aesthetic, including discussions on Negritude, African and African American relationships, and the African personality," as the main focus of her research. Her objective was to depict the "current state of thinking" about the concepts, and to present an instructional guide for teachers of college and upper high school level students which would help African American students improve their writing skills. A major purpose of her work was to explode the myth that African American children were unable to write by providing an instructional model which not only eschewed traditional European-based teaching methods and theories, but which utilized the African aesthetic (as reflected in continental African Literature and as synthesized into African American life-styles and culture) as the foundation of her instructional program.

Although the term "Afrocentricity" had not yet become popularized and was not used by the author in her description of the study, her methodology was Afrocentric for both the content and intent of her dissertation. She placed the African aesthetic at the center or core of her literary analysis; and she identified specific instructional needs of African American students (in the area of writing) as the specific reasons for her research. In her attempt to clarify the need for this research, Hill also addressed concerns and educational issues which were very similar to the political and cultural dogma espoused by Larry Neal, Addison Gayle, Stokely Carmichael, and other leading voices of the Black Power/Black Arts Movement. This was particularly true when she wrote the following:

> ...it is time for teachers to call a moratorium on propriety of language and give more attention to the content and process of writing. We need to concentrate more on the person, his expressiveness his individuality, his search for truth [my emphasis]. For all of the students who have come to hate writing and themselves because of their failures at it, we must develop alternative writing programs which will help these students to improve their self-image as well as their ability to write. (Hill, 1974: 9)

Although a mere two years had passed since Gayle's Black Aesthetic was published, and for the first time a collective scholarly effort had been made by African American intellectuals to clearly define the long overlooked, denied, or maligned African aesthetic, Hill conducted her research from the given premise that "although one is sure that there is something such as an African aesthetic, certainly very little has been done to define it" (p.1). To support her thesis and clarify the problem her study would address, Hill frequently quoted the contributors to the landmark work, and went so far as to insist that the educational establishment accept some of the hard realities exposed in the text. For example, she quoted John O'Neal who had contributed "Black Arts' Notebook" to the publication:

> Western culture is simply decadent. It has lived past the point of the creativity of its values and continues only because of the accumulated momentum of its past, going blindly now on a course over which persons no longer have control. The machinery demands the perpetuation of itself quite apart from the intention or desire of the persons who operate and who are operated by it. (O'Neal, 1972: 47)

In this study I follow a similar two-part approach--beginning with a review and analysis of relevant issues (those which attempt to address the educational deficits of African American children) in the pedagogical literature of the past two decades; and continuing with a suggested model to address concerns and issues raised in the analysis. The specific subject of my study is also similar to the topic chosen by Hill (education of African American students, Black

Literature, and the use of Afrocentric paradigms); but my study expands the earlier work by incorporating the key issues of the Afrocentric philosophical movement, which has evolved over the past thirteen years and was largely based on the premier work of the Senegalese scholar, Cheikh Anta Diop. Diop's grounding work has been crystalized in recent years by several Afrocentric scholars, including Molefi K. Asante (1987, 1988, 1990 and 1991); Kariamu Welsh-Asante (1990; 1991b); Asa Hilliard (1984, 1985, 1990); Wade Nobles (1990); Dona Richards (1990); Maulana Karenga (1984b, 1986, 1989); Jacob Carruthers (1986); and C. T. Keto (1989).

RESEARCH METHOD

Using **Afrocentric Methodology,** this study synthesizes key issues, needs, educational strategies, prescriptions, and policies which emerged (or reemerged) in the pedagogical literature of the past twenty years (since the Black Cultural Revolution of the 1960's and early 1970's) to address the instructional problems which have impeded the cognitive growth, development, and attainment of self-esteem for the vast majority of African American children.

The pedagogical literature used in the study is drawn from various sources, including educational indexes and journals, popular magazines, newspapers, scholarly books, government studies and publications, dissertation abstracts, professional conferences, papers, and reports which were published or presented in the past twenty years. A publication was selected for analysis and included in the literature review if its primary purpose or objective was to address the educational deficits or needs of African American children. In this one sense, the pedagogical literature included in this study is Afrocentric. Since there were very few references found in pedagogical literature which specifically addresses both the instructional needs of African American children, and the infusion of Black Literature in the elementary and secondary grade curricula, a more general, non-scientific selection process was followed. This study includes pedagogical literature which encompasses any area identified as an educational issue, need, or deficit for African American children.

The central paradigmatic approach of this study is **functional**, for the objective of the literature review, synthesis, and analysis, is to identify Afrocentric paradigms (i.e., Afrocentric concepts or understandings which collectively form a set of assumptions which determine what is in the best interest of African American children) which may be used as the foundation for instructional models designed to help eliminate educational deficits for African American children.

My initial objective was to identify specific issues raised in the writings of key individuals, such as Larry Neal, who helped to define the Black Power/Black Arts Movement. I then determined whether or not these same issues, or reflections of these issues, were subsequently raised in the pedagogical literature published in the years following the Black Power/Arts Movement which offers analyses or prescriptions for improving the education of African American children. My third objective was to select common Afrocentric concepts and paradigms found through out the literature included in the review. They were then transformed into questions which may then be used to create instructional models (or teaching strategies) for the evaluation and instruction of Black Literature to African American students in elementary, middle, and secondary grades. The literature selected for analysis in these models, and/or included in recommended bibliographies, was written primarily by African American (i.e., U.S.A. born) authors. Based on the definitions which follow, it may be classified both as Black Literature and as Afrocentric literature.

My methodology is Afrocentric. Like the African aesthetic itself, this methodology is multidimensional and holistic (Welsh-Asante, 1993), as well as functional (Asante, 1990). The idiosyncratic nature of the problem (identifying and utilizing Afrocentric paradigms to eliminate deficits and enhance instruction of Black Literature specifically for African American children, and generally for all children) necessitates the inclusion and synthesis of pedagogical literature from educational, psychological, and sociological sources; as well as the writings of literary critics and political activists who shaped the ideology and identified major issues of the Black Power/Arts Movement.

Following the first two introductory chapters which provide the rationale, clarify the problem and subproblems, explain the methodology, and review the pedagogical literature assessed in the study; a third and fourth chapter explores the historical framework of the overall African American literary tradition, and examines the evolution of Afrocentric literature for children in the United States. Chapters five, six, and seven is devoted to each of three broad instructional levels for children--elementary grades (pre-K through

4th), middle grades (5th through 8th), and secondary grades (9th through 12th). Afrocentric analyses of grade-appropriate Black Literature, which address cosmological, axiological, and/or epistemological issues, [as reflected in the fifteen questions transformed from Afrocentric paradigms identified in the pedagogical literature] which are considered principal issues in Afrocentric inquiry (Asante, 1990), are presented as models of instruction for professional and non-professional educators. Using the same pedagogical sources listed above, as well as additional publications and references which focus specifically on juvenile, children's, or young adult literature, the study identifies general instructional issues and strategies for this genre. One representative author for the lower grades and one for the middle grades was selected for in depth analysis based on the following requirements:

1) they have written five or more books in the past two decades classified as juvenile or young adult literature;
2) they have chosen the African or African American experience as the central reference point for their major characters and plots;
3) they have received major awards or recognition from Afrocentric organizations, institutions, or committees for their publications (i.e., The Carter G. Woodson Award, Council on Interracial Books for Children Award, the Coretta Scott King Award); and

4) they have demonstrated through their behavior, writing, and remarks their commitment to empowering and liberating African American children (i.e., they are, by my definition, Afrocentric).

Each author (**Eloise Greenfield** for the lower grade level, and **Walter Dean Myers** for the middle grade level) is **located** to determine their historical, cultural, and geographical centrism; or as Asante has explained, to determine "the centrality of their African ideals and values" (1990: 6). Using the questions drawn from the Afrocentric paradigms identified in the pedagogical and Black Arts Movement literature as guides, several books and publications by each author are analyzed and suggested instructional strategies and approaches are offered.

Although literature primarily from the past two decades (following the Black Power/Black Arts Movement) was used as the specific references for these analyses, in a broader sense, the entire African historical and cultural experience, both continental and diasporan, and the African aesthetic which permeates this collective reality, have dictated the paradigms utilized in both the evaluation of appropriate instructional materials, and the teaching strategies suggested for exploring this literature.

In the seventh chapter, I focus specifically on educational issues and teaching strategies for older (mature readers) secondary students, which may be used with any of the authors and writings discussed in Chapter Three as reflections of the entire African American literary tradition. Some of the theoretical issues raised in the literature of the Black Arts Movement, and later expanded and crystalized by authors whose writings have helped to define Afrocentric theory and methodology in recent years (Asante, 1990, 1991b, and 1989; Welsh-Asante, 1993; Karenga, 1984b; Richards, 1990; Hilliard, 1990; Keto, 1990; and Myers, 1989), were used as the basis of Afrocentric analyses of literature by two selected authors from this tradition who are commonly recognized as key figures in the historical development of the African American literary tradition (**Zora Neale Hurston and James Baldwin**); and whose collective writings may be defined as literary legacies for African American youth (Holmes, 1993).

In the final chapter (eighth), I provide a summary and general conclusions for my overall study which addresses the inclusion of Afrocentric literature in the elementary and secondary school curricula to address the educational needs of African American children.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

I will include an instructional model with suggested approaches, goals, objectives, strategies, etc. for teaching Black Literature to support the instructional program of all children; but the primary objective of the model is to offer instructional strategies which will support the educational growth and development of African American children (and young adults) who collectively have suffered from persistent miseducation. This miseducation has resulted from faulty lesson content, as well as instructional intent, both consciously and unconsciously delivered (Irvine, 1990).

The following literature review demonstrates the multi-faceted nature of the educational deficits which have resulted from the miseducation of African American children in the United States, but the curriculum and instructional program are only two of several areas where constructive change is indicated (Edmonds, 1986; Melnick and Hall, 1986; and Irvine, 1990). This study does not attempt to address all problem areas found in elementary and secondary schools or instructional programs, but focuses on the instruction of Black Literature and associated language arts skills for children in these grade levels.

The literature included in the recommended bibliographies is not inclusive, but is intended to provide a broad overview of selected titles which may be included in one or more of the three instructional levels addressed. The specific works selected for analysis in the study were used to demonstrate general approaches and instructional strategies for teaching elementary (pre-K through 4th grades), middle (5th through 8th grades), and senior high school students (9th through 12th grades); but separate models were not provided for every grade within each level. Editors and authors may have suggested that an individual book is appropriate for readers at various ages (i.e., 1 thrugh 5 years), grades (i.e., 5th thrugh 8th grades) and/or levels; therefore, this information has also been included with recommended instructional strategies.

The questions suggested for identifying Afrocentric paradigms (Nos. 1-15 listed above) are also presented as general guidelines for teaching the books included in the appendixes of recommended bibliographies, or for evaluating these books, as well as other literature which may not be included in these lists. It is not suggested that all questions could be answered affirmatively for recommended titles.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Paradigm has been defined in various ways depending on the frame of reference, background and/or objectives of the individual providing the definition. Where one general social research textbook defines paradigm as "a fundamental model or scheme that organizes our view of something, without necessarily answering important questions, but telling the researcher where to look for answers" (Babbie, 1989: 47); another writer, Terry Kershaw, with a particular concern for paradigms in the African American Studies field first defined a paradigm as "a set of assumptions in a discipline that determine range of phenomena, concepts, theories and methodology" (Kershaw, 1989: 45). He then then gave a definition for a paradigm of Black Studies that not only acknowledged its ability to determine proper subject matter, but also the appropriate methodology which should be followed as well.

Kershaw's definition is more closely in accord with my use of the term in this dissertation, because his definition, like my own, is linked to basic assumptions of the field of African American Studies which reinforce the concept of **Afrocentricity.** These assumptions are:

> 1. that Black experiences are unique and worthy of intellectual study;
> 2. that the field is broad-based and only limited by the historical experiences (i.e., political, economic, historical, and artistic) of all peoples of African ancestry; and
> 3. that these experiences are distinctive in terms of their relationship with other people. (Kershaw, 1989: 47)

Afrocentricity, as discussed above, and as reiterated by Kershaw, refers to the life experiences of all people of African descent as the center of analysis. This concept emphasizes an analysis rooted in the historical reality of Black people without negating or minimizing the experience of other groups. On the other hand, if the perception of reality painted by other groups serves to negate or diminish the African/African American historical or cultural reality, it is imperative that the **Afrocentric paradigm** reorder, reconstruct, and ultimately destroy this false perception. In this sense, [and the assumption is my own, not necessarily Kershaw's] the Afrocentric paradigm continues the task begun at least two decades ago by the creators of the political, nationalistic Black Arts Movement:

> In order to perform this task [speak directly to the needs and aspiration of black America], the Black Arts Movement proposes a separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconology... Like the main tenet of Black Power, which is the necessity for black people to define the world in their own terms, ...the primary thrust of this new breed of contemporary writers is

> to confront the contradictions arising out of the black man's experience in the racist West, i.e., reevaluating Western aesthetics. (Neal, 1989b: 62)

Black Literature is another term which needs to be clarified for a complete understanding of the objectives of this dissertation. Although one objective is to provide a model for teaching Black Literature which utilizes Afrocentric paradigms, it should be clear that the color of the writer's skin, or his/her ethnicity, is irrelevant. The literature created by these authors, by my definition, is Black Literature because it serves to honestly portray or recreate the worldview, cultural, historical, and/or aesthetic experiences of African peoples. If this is the case, then it would also be accurate to refer to this literature as **Afrocentric**. It therefore follows that non-African authors may write Afrocentrically, while authors of African ancestry may write from a perspective that would not be described as Africa-centered or Afrocentric. What they write and how they express their concepts would make this determination. It is rare when an individual who has not directly experienced an historical or cultural reality is able to accurately recreate another's reality, but it does happen in some instances. On the other hand, it is equally possible for an individual to have become so miseducated, off-centered, and therefore mentally dominated by another worldview, that the literature he or she creates is as contrary to the collective reality of the ethnic group to which he or she belongs to by birth, as black is to white (Baldwin, 1987)

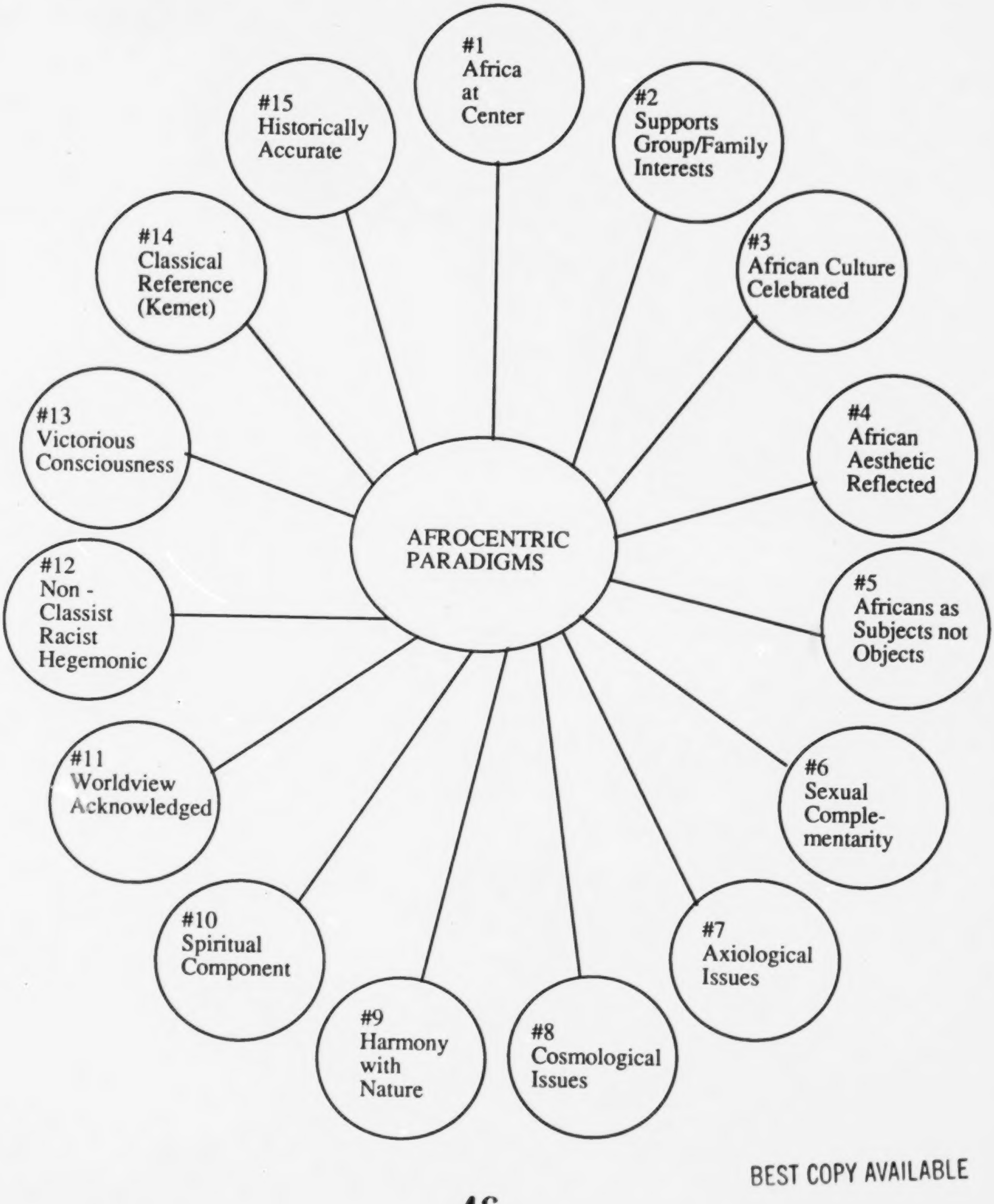
NOTES

Chapter 1

[1] The "fire" symbol which Neal used in his 1971, essay, "The Black Arts Movement," published in The Black Aesthetic, edited by Addison Gayle, Jr., had been introduced earlier in the title chosen for the anthology of African American writing that he and Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka) co-edited in 1968, Black Fire. This earlier anthology was recognized as the official introduction and voice of the Black Arts Movement, as its editors and contributors attempted to unite culturally, ethically, and spiritually with the black masses in Watts, Harlem, Detroit, Philadelphia, Hartford, and other cities across the nation, who responded literally with "fire" and rebellion when the weight of oppression and white racism became unbearable. Neal believed that ethics should not be divorced from aesthetics, and art should not be separate from the spiritual grounding and struggles of Black people.

FIGURE 1

Holmes Afrocentric Paradigm Model
as Literary Indicators


AFROCENTRIC PARADIGMS
#1 Africa at Center
#2 Supports Group/Family Interests
#3 African Culture Celebrated
#4 African Aesthetic Reflected
#5 Africans as Subjects not Objects
#6 Sexual Comple-mentarity
#7 Axiological Issues
#8 Cosmological Issues
#9 Harmony with Nature
#10 Spiritual Component
#11 Worldview Acknowledged
#12 Non - Classist Racist Hegemonic
#13 Victorious Consciousness
#14 Classical Reference (Kemet)
#15 Historically Accurate

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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

GENERAL RESPONSES TO THE EDUCATIONAL STATUS AND NEEDS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN

The same year that Larry Neal helped to define the issues of the Black Arts Movement and contributed his "aesthetic framework" to Addison Gayle's Black Aesthetic (1972), Banks and Dresden edited a collection of essays in a publication entitled Black Self-Concept: Implications for Education and Social Science. Nancy Arnez contributed the essay, "Enhancing the Black Self-Concept Through Literature," to the publication. Her objectives were threefold: to explain some new research about the self-concept of black children; to show how ingrained biases of white critics prevented the use of black literature in the schools to build the positive self-concept of black children; and to recommend the use of new revolutionary black literature as a means of enhancing this positive self-concept (Arnez, 1972). The results of her research reinforced the finds of earlier studies which had revealed the tendency for Black children to reject themselves over and over again as they opted for white dolls, white skin and white friends (Kenneth and Mamie Clark, 1945; Goodman, 1952; Trager and Yarrow, 1952; Landreth and Johnson, 1953; Moreland, 1958; and Stevenson and Stewart, 1958).

The "psychological damage" that had been caused by the racist character of the American society in its treatment of African peoples as a sub-human species, was not only identified through this social science research, it was also reinforced by its constant repetition and defeatist frame of reference. Instead of using the results of earlier research to stimulate further research that might identify the **causes** of black children's negative self-images, or possible solutions if this was found to be a reality, the studies became the excuse for "crystallizing negative attitudes of teachers toward children and their home condition" (Arnez, 1972: 96).

To help social scientists move beyond the negative findings from research done in the 40's, 50's and early 60's, Arnez outlined some of the current research that had been made after the advent of the Black Revolution (1966), and Black Literature and history were taught for the first time in many of the nation's schools.

In each of four new (at that time) studies (Larson, Olson, Totdahl, and Jensen, 1966; Georgeoff, 1967; Roth, 1969; and Hodgkins and Stakenas, 1969) black children demonstrated positive self-concepts and racial pride. Apparently, the use of instructional materials designed to enhance a child's self-concept could go a long way in correcting past ills. Arnez explained that black people had been told so often that they had negative self-concepts that it was necessary to counteract this negativism by "taking the position of black narcissism, the position that black people love themselves, in spite of conscious efforts to cause self-hatred by the European oppressor, black people have continued to feel good about themselves" (p. 97).

Arnez's third objective focused on the use of "new revolutionary Black literature which alludes to the black life style, experiments with unique rhythms, different syntactical forms, and new orthography in tune with speech patterns of black people" (p. 105). The works of young writers such as Don L. Lee (a.k.a. Haki Madhabuti), Sonia Sanchez, Jewel Latimore, Mari Evans, Carolyn Rodgers, and Ethridge Knight were identified as carrying a revolutionary message of nationhood. She also explained that young black writers who were producing this new literature which combined sociopolitical themes with the aesthetic, had been more-or-less excluded from all publications except a few controlled by African Americans (i.e., Black World and Broadside Press). There were also a few anthologies such as Black Voices, edited by Abraham Chapman (1968), which included one or two of the new black writers, along with the writings of older black writers whose messages of positive black self-esteem were much more subtle. Without expert teaching, the messages of liberation, victory, self-esteem and black pride in these older works could too easily be overlooked when presented to children.

After providing various instructional approaches for teaching this new literature, Arnez reiterated her main premise--that every ethnic group must define itself from within its own set of experiences. No person outside the contours of this group life can affirm or repudiate this existence or explain the feelings of members. The significance of her conclusions were even more cogent when considered in light of the information presented in 1968, by Dr. Edward K. Weaver, who was Dean and Professor of

Education at Atlanta University, when he published an article in Freedomways entitled, "The New Literature on Education of the Black Child."

Weaver referred to the plethora of books and articles, mostly written by whites and to some extent directed to white audiences, which emerged during the 60's, based on a concern for the education of the disadvantaged, and especially compensatory education for black ghetto children. His review of some 75 books and more than 250 articles led to the following conclusions:

> 1. The "new" literature is full of unclarified issues, with much debate about the proper designation of the area (the deprived, the disadvantaged, the alienated, the wretched, the poor, or as one individual puts it, the depraved).
>
> 2. Black people in the United States have been studied and manipulated more than any other group of Americans; and black scholars, including sociologists, anthropologists, economists, social workers, historians, psychologists, and educators, have dealt with aspects of the "Negro Problem" in most of their masters and doctoral studies, and in their professional writings, for many years. This vast body of scientific literature has been virtually ignored by authors of the "new" literature.
>
> 3. It is quite obvious that the purpose of this new material is not to expand the field of knowledge and help to define solutions to problems that have been allowed to exist for over three decades; but to convince ignorant whites that it is now necessary to do something about the poor

> quality of education for black children, while maintaining the status quo.
>
> 4. The compensatory education program for the black child developed in response to this literature are too little too late and are based on theories of colonialism, dependency, and power. They have been developed in response to the requirements for obtaining grants and funding, rather the true educational needs of African American children. (Weaver, 1968: 265-272)

Weaver's article was reprinted in 1972, and included in the education section of Black Psychology, edited by Reginald L. Jones. Jones' work included articles by more than thirty-five of the most knowledgeable African American psychologists, behavioral and social scientists of the day, who collectively recognized the need to speak for themselves and move away from the "pathology-oriented notions about behavior of black people toward creating, interpreting, and reinterpreting the psychological literature of blacks" (Jones, 1972: xi). These scholars recognized the need for a journal of black psychology which would not discriminate against researchers who ignored the commonly accepted paradigms which dictated most of the previous research (i.e., prior to the Black Revolution) focusing on black people. This journal would provide a forum for this new breed of Afrocentric scholars. Cobbs' article, "The Black Revolution and Education," initially published in 1969, in the National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, was also reprinted and included in this publication.

A few years after the start of the Black Revolution in the United States, it became clear that anyone truly interested in addressing the educational needs of the African American child had a clear beginning framework, based on solid, black-defined parameters and foundations. The Federal government, like most other white-controlled institutions in the nation, responded to the acknowledged educational crisis in an inappropriate manner.

In 1972, the same year that *Black Psychology* and *Black Self-Image: Implications for Education and Social Science* were published, the federal government chose to ignore the research which demonstrated the historical and sociological basis for numerous educational problems impacting the the African American student on a nation-wide basis. Instead, government leaders formed the "Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency," and conducted numerous hearings and testimony from over 500 witnesses on a variety of related topics. To many members of the African American community it had become painfully clear that once again the warnings of African American scholars such as Dr. Price Cobbs would go unheeded. Cobbs had explained years earlier that "talking about law and order and adhering to the status quo" would never address the underlying problems which caused black students to react violently to the years of miseducation which had turned the so-called "American dream" into their very own American nightmare (Cobbs, 1969: 5).

Following the lead of the government and popular (generally non-African American) public opinion, the National Institute of Education began in 1976 to collect data on school crime in the nation. They reported that three million secondary students were victims each month of attack, robbery or theft in our nations schools (Bayh, 1978). For the next several years continuing controversy over the scope and severity of school crime and violence led to more studies, reports, polls, new books and journal articles that brought attention and professional recognition to authors, funding for program proposals, business for publishing companies, and little or no educational change for the majority of African American students (Bauer, 1985; McDaniel, 1986; Thomas, 1980; Duke, 1977; Goldstein, 1984; Deitz and Hummel, 1978; and Duke and Mekel, 1980).

Although the early 1980's witnessed grim assessments and predictions for the nation's poor African American children (Edelman, 1981), the new directions in the area of research in Black self-concept identified by Arnez in 1972, continued into the mid 80's (Mboya, 1986, Richmond, Clark and Brown, 1985, Pasteur and Toldson, 1982, Howard and Hammond, 1985).

In 1983, Hilliard wrote an article that stressed the the necessity for an Afrocentric analysis of phenomena that concerned African American people. In "Psychological factors Associated with Language in the Education of the African American Child," he criticized the European American linguists who had dominated the research and writings about the language of African Americans, without having the necessary preparation to understand the phenomena they have observed--a knowledge of the African antecedents of African American language and culture. Instead of addressing questions concerning the impact and appropriateness of "Black English" in the nation's schools, he posited that the issue should be "the nature of the psychological problems associated with language and education that are a direct outgrowth of the political relationship between African and European Americans" (Hilliard, 1983: 25). By redefining the issues and redirecting the focus to an African reference point, Hilliard had provided a model for future Afrocentric education researchers. At the same time he was expanding the theory popularized by Asante who published in 1980, the first of several works which explore the concept of **Afrocentricity** and the need for a African-centered reference for phenomena concerning African peoples.

The research of other scholars which addressed educational issues concerning African American children (Apple, 1983, Anyon, 1981, Jackson, 1983) suggested that there is a "hidden curriculum" that teaches the African child that to be successful in school is to adopt behavior which will ultimately lead to failure (low-paying, low status jobs, diminished self-concepts and feelings of inferiority) in life. Their individual and collective findings reinforced the growing awareness of the need for an Afrocentric curriculum (even when this term was not specifically used).

In 1986, Boykin contributed a chapter entitled "The Triple Quandary and the Schooling of Afro-American Children" to a book edited by U. Neisser, entitled The School Achievement of Minority Children. His chapter stressed the position that not only do African Americans have a culture that is distinct, African-based, identifiable, and more ancient than European culture, but that the two cultures are incongruous and contradictory (Boykin, 1986, quoted in Irvine, 1990).

A few years earlier he had drawn conclusions which were very much in accord with Hilliard's perspective which challanged so-called "deficit theories" promulgated by psychologists and sociologists which led to the creation of educational remediation and intervention programs for African American children (Boykin, 1983). Although well-intentioned, Boykin stressed his contention that these programs and the theories which generated them were Eurocentric and reflective of the individuals who created them from paradigms which suggested that all cultures should be evaluated through the Euro-American world view. Based on his analysis of African and African American cultural styles, He offered a number of concrete suggestions to educators which would help in developing classroom practices and curricular materials to better serve the academic interest and needs of African American children. One of his first prescriptions was the necessity for greater understanding and acceptance of black cultural reality by researchers, policy makers, administrators and teachers. An understanding of cultural **difference**, he contended, should be the first step in designing culturally appropriate pedagogic formats. To clarify the cultural differences of the African American children found in today's classrooms, Boykin emulated the pattern established nearly a generation earlier by Larry Neal and other major voices from the Black Arts Movement--he returned to **Africa** to find the genesis and a cultural reference point, then moved on to trace its transformation in the United States. Although he did not specifically reference Larry Neal, Addison Gayle, Hoyt Fuller or other scholars who attempted to clarify the African aesthetic in the landmark 1972 publication, some of the same cultural sources cited by these authors in The Black Aesthetic (i.e., Mbiti, 1970; Jahn, 1961; Herskovitz, 1958; and Thompson, 1966) were utilized by Boykin to develop and support his thesis. In his explanation of black cultural reality from an **African** perspective, Boykin outlined the following values and beliefs which he determined were included in this world view:

> 1) the universe as a vitalistic life force; with human beings harmoniously conjoined with the cosmos;
>
> 2) all beings as unique, although an interconnection exists;
>
> 3) spiritual forces which are part and parcel of all things, animate and inanimate, material or nonmaterial;
>
> 4) a core set of values including:
>   a) rhythmic-music-movement orientation,
>   b) an emphasis on affect,
>   c) communalism, expressive individualism,
>   d) a social time perspective,
>   e) orality, and
>   f) a person-to person orientation;
>
> 5) the spoken word which makes communication more alive, emotionally rich textured, and rhymic being more highly valued than the written word;
>
> 6) time not governed by objective reality, but by the mental and spiritual dictates of the specific communal and social realities;
>
> 7) personal relationships of utmost importance, and authority invested in the individual rather than the office or position held. (1983: 344-345)

In "Reflections of the Black Aesthetic" (1972), Larry Neal included a rough overview of certain categories and elements which he posited needed further elaboration (p. 12). "Race Memory" and "Transmutation and Synthesis" were two of his designated categories. Boykin, again in a similar conceptual frame of reference, suggested that the evolution of the modern African American cultural ethos found in today's classroom is rooted and perhaps unconsciously evolved from an African aesthetic which encompassed these cultural values and beliefs (p. 340). He also contended that time, distance and the unique African American experiences helped to shape this ethos.

Boykin argued specifically that nine interrelated yet distinctive realms or dimensions may be found in a transformed state from their African genesis, in African American culture, and therefore must be addressed if culturally meaningful educational experiences for African American children are to be planned. These dimensions are as follows:

> 1) Spirituality - involves an approch to life which accepts the significance of the nonmaterial, and reinforces the existence of greater powers than man. These greater spiritual essences are important, bring meaning to life, and should be be respected.
>
> 2) Harmony - supports the conviction that "what will happen will happen," and individuals see him or herself as part of a whole environment, rather than a compartmentalized reality. Versatility is valued over a narrow range of expertise.
>
> 3) Movement - incorporates music, dance, percussiveness, and rhythm as one vital and whole entity which supports psychological health and existence. A

rhythmic orientation is evident in aspects of self-presentation and orientation.

4) Verve - suggests that the end does not justify the means if the means are dull, routinized and bland. the multi-dimensional, energetic, lively, and stimulating aspects of life are highly valued and preferred.

5) Affect - suggests an integration of feelings with actions which would make it difficult to do that which one has no feelings for or interest in doing. Emotional expressiveness and sensitivity to other's emotional cues are also suggested.

6) Communalism - demonstrates an awareness of the interdependence of people, and leans toward the social rather than the individual. The self is perceived as located within the group, and the group cohesiveness is deemed more important that individual needs, privileges and rights.

7) Expressive individualism - suggests that being correct or efficient is less important than style and placing a personal and distinctive stamp on an activity. Emphasis is placed on the spontaneous, as opposed to systematic planning.

8) Orality - "oral virtuosity" is highly valued and cultivated, and the knowledge gained through this medium is equally respected. Meaning is derived not merely from the literal definition of the word, but the oral presentation of this word. Call-and-response mode of communication suggests an awareness of the interconnectedness of speaker and listener. Speaking becomes performance as well as communication.

9) Social time perspective - suggests that the event, not the clock or the calendar dictates time. Social traditions and customs serve as guideposts for future activities. (pp. 345-347)

Since the typical American classroom ethos or culture has been dictated by the European American world view and cultural reality (according to Boykin, Hale-Benson, and Irvine), conflicts would naturally be expected to arise in this arena if African American students are denied the opportunity to express their unique cultural propensities and are forced to shape their "roundness" to fit square educational modes.

By 1988, the continued development and explication of the Afrocentric theory and method by Asante, who published the first edition of Afrocentricity in 1980, and The Afrocentric Idea, in 1984; and others throughout the country such as Hilliard (1983, 1984, and 1985), had made an impact which was evident in traditional publications serving the professional needs of elementary and secondary school educators. For example, Oliver (1988) cited Asante's The Afrocentric Idea (1987) as a major reference for an article published in the English Journal, the literary publication of the National Council of Teachers of English. "An Afrocentric Approach to literature: Putting the Pieces Back Together," followed the model demonstrated by Hilliard five years earlier, but with a more explicit theoretical framework.

Irvine's Black Students and School Failure, published by Greenwood in 1990, not only delineated a process model grounded in Asante's concept of Afrocentricity to explain some significant factors which either contribute or inhibit the achievement of black students, but she also redirected the paradigms to emphasize the failure of the schools and the educational process, rather than the children who were the focus too often in the past. Irvine's major thesis was that the lack of cultural synchronization [which is rooted in the concept of Afrocentricity and the cultural distinctiveness of African American life], and negative teacher expectations result in hidden, often unintended, conflict between teachers and their students (p. xvii). This so-called lack of cultural sync between African American children and Eurocentric schools "becomes evident in instructional situations in which teachers misinterpret, denigrate, and dismiss black students' language, non-verbal clues, physical cues, physical movements, learning styles, cognitive approaches, and worldview" (Irvine, 1990: xix).

For a more extensive treatment of the subject of African American behavior as a reflection of African cultural retentions, Irvine refers her readers to Asante's 1988 publication of Afrocentricity. For a better understanding of the theory which suggests that cultural sync is a necessary ingredient for the successful instruction of African American children, she listed the names of several scholars whose work has supported this theory--Boykin, 1986; Hale-Benson, 1986; Hilliard, 1983; Kochman, 1981, Pasteur and Toldson, 1982; and Shade, 1982.

In the early 1970's, the years immediately following the social and cultural upheavals caused by the Black Power/Black Arts Movements in the United States, the federal government had decided to ignore the warnings of scholars such as Cobbs, 1969; Banks and Dresden, 1972; Arnez, 1972; and others who had outlined some of the underlying causes of the many problems impacting the nation's schools. Although the ongoing educational deficits for African American children were high on this list of problem producers, the government decided to focus instead on the outcomes of these deficits. Research efforts, funding, and recognition were channeled to those with prescriptions for ending the violence and the increasing fears of teachers and administrators working in the nation's schools (Bayh, 1978; Duke, 1977; Deitz and Hummel, 1978). The root causes of these problems were ignored. In spite of the misdirected efforts of the federal government, and its continuing failure to address the educational practices which adversely impact African American children's learning, self-esteem and behavior, the years following the Black Revolution witnessed many positive forward steps to improve past errors; but unfortunately, equally as many steps backward.

One organization, the *Council on Interracial Books for Children,* must be counted on the side of positive change. In 1986, it celebrated 20 years of service, "in making the public aware of the state of chldren's literature, in encouraging publishers to acknowledge and accept their responsibility to all of the groups that comprise our society, and in supporting the efforts of writers and illustrators of color to produce literature that is truthful and humane" (Greenfield, 1986a: 215).

Berlyle Banfield, president of the Council, and a curriculum developer specializing in the area of African American History, contributed two articles to the 1985 (Vol. 16, No. 7) issue of their Bulletin--"Guidelines for Choosing Books on African American Themes" (pp. 9-11), and "Books on African American Themes: A Recommended Booklist" (pp. 4-8). These two articles were typical of the insightful information and instructional support the Council has provided over the past twenty years for schools, libraries, and concerned individuals. Referring to the statistics provided earlier that year in the Children's Literature Review (Sims, 1985), Banfield explained some of the harsh realities which have transpired over recent years:

> 1. During the late 60's and 70's, the demands raised by the Civil Rights Movement [and the Black Revolution which followed it] for a more equitable representation of the life, history, and culture of African Americans, created a climate that publishers could not afford to ignore.
>
> 2. In addition to the numerous publications by non-African Americans, which were of questionable value, many works, written out of "love and concern for the Black child and sensitivity to the literary and emotional needs of all children," were also added to the works by older, established, African American authors. [Also see Hale (1982), Kunjufu (1984), Glasser (1975), Canfield and Wells (1976), and Brooks (1985.]
>
> 3. Since the mid-70's, the number of available children's books dealing with black life has steadly declined. [Also see Greenfield (1986], Taxel (1986), Madhubuti (1986), MacCann, 1986), Sims (1985), Muse (1975), and Corson (1987).]
>
> 4. The eighties witnessed a greatly lessened national interest in civil rights, as the Republican controlled federal government moved to wipe out the "hard-won gains" of the era.
>
> 5. Publishers responded by finding other "hot topics" [i.e., "School Violence and Vandalism"]

> to promote, as they ignored the submissions by new African American writers. Older works of "recognized literary merit" were allowed to go out of print. (pp. 4-8)

Although so-called "national interests" and the purely economic interests of the majority of the nation's publishers veered in different directions, the continuing deficits and educational needs of the African American child remained a paramount issue to many African American scholars, concerned individuals, and the organizations they collectively formed. The eighties and early nineties witnessed numerous attempts to move the agenda for identifying specific plans for educational improvement which would "save the African American child" (NABSE, 1984).

The Coretta Scott King Award, [see Appendix A for list of winning books] first established in 1970, under the auspices of the American Library Association's Social Responsibilities Round Table, is another innovation which should be listed in the record of positive changes to improve past errors and injustices. It has been gaining influence since its inception and has led to an increased awareness, prominence, and assessability of the collection of books by Black American authors (MacCann and Woodard, 1985: 13). This award honors the Black American author who has created the year's most distinguished children's book or young adult book. A similar award honors a Black illustrator.

Reiterating a theme that has frequently been heard throughout the eighties and early 1990's, MacCann and Woodard discussed in the introduction of The Black American in Books for Children (1985), the hope for social progress which was so pervasive in the early 70's, but was substantially undermined by retrogressive affirmative action programs. The belief that awareness would automatically lead to equity and justice in the books offered to children in the nation's schools and libraries, had unfortunately been a pipe dream; and the struggle for necessary change had to continue. It became clear that the traditions a racist society produces in the process of building and maintaining a cultural "status quo" are not easily shaken.

COLLECTIVE RESPONSES FROM THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

The Black Revolution had a tremendous impact on many African Americans in the nation and throughout the African diaspora. For the first time many men, women, and children of African ancestry were able to look at themselves, their history, and their culture without the biases imposed by the politically dominant European culture. They did not intend to turn the clock back when the federal government stopped supporting (or never supported) the many efforts which were initiated to reshape the nation's educational institutions which had been accused of miseducating African American children for so many years (Woodson, 1933)

Many individuals in the same fields of interest (i.e., psychologists, sociologists, historians, teachers, lawyers, and writers) joined forces throughout the country to continue the strides begun in the 60's to liberate the minds and spirits of their people. Some worked within separate African American organizations, and others formed black caucuses within national and state professional organizations to ensure that the black perspective did not get overlooked once again.

On November 8 - 10, 1974 , **The First National Conference of Afro-American Writers** was sponsored by Howard University's Institute for the Arts and Humanities. This first gathering of African writers was well-attended and attracted close to 3000 persons to the Washington, D. C. campus from all over the country. The theme of the conference was "The Image of Black Folk in American Literature;" and some of the most talented writers of that time attended and took part in the program. Well aware that the struggle for positive change would not continue unless the people who were most negatively impacted by the past centuries of omissions and distortions of the African American image united and collectively recommited themselves to this battle, they made this commitment on this occasion (Killens, 1976).

Members of the *Black Caucus of the National Council of Teachers of English,* another example of positive change, were responsible for the publication of an excellent book written for teachers of African American students at all levels--Tapping Potential: English and Language Arts for the Black Learner (Brooks, 1985). The work presented teaching approaches and methods that "are known to be appropriate for blacks that are based on both research and practice in the areas of language, reading, writing, and literature" (p. 2). Some of the topics discussed in the 43 essays included in the work are as follows:

1. teacher attitudes and language teaching
2. using a black learning style
3. the writing of black poetry
4. using folk literature in teaching composition
5. teaching the literature of black America
6. origins of a black literary tradition
7. the black teenager in award-winning young adult novels
8. putting Africa into the curriculum through African Literature.

In the chapter titled, "Introduction: The Literature of Black America--The Noise of Reading," Cook drew analogies between the broad cultural reality provided through reading literature and the "real world" as the reader knows it. When literature is good, he contended, it not only helps the individual see and understand their self and their own culture, but it also helps the student make connections between this world and other possible worlds. Before this "power of literature" can work to clarify and expand the reader's world, it must first allow him or her to realistically see self, before moving to broader realities.

Cook referred to a concept discussed in an earlier article by David Dorsey (1977), and defined this difference between our own world and the other world of literature as the source of "noise," which is harmful if it is too strong and prevents us from "hearing the voices which speak to us through the works which we read. 'Noise' is to be desired; too much 'noise' is to be avoided" (p. 245). Cook went on to advise teachers to prepare themselves to fully use the experiences of students as well as their cultural reality (language and living experiences) when selecting literature and presenting these works in the classroom. He reinforced the need for educators to understand the cultural tradition from which literature rises because literature reflects culture. Sounding a note similar to the voices which emerged from the Black Arts Movement, he also discussed the "liberating and life-giving power" of books as expressed in Black Literature such as Richard Wright's biography, Black Boy (1945), Alice Childress' novel, Short Walk (1972), numerous slave narratives, poems and plays by African Americans. Although he did not use the specific term "Afrocentricity," or suggest the use of Afrocentric paradigms to teach black literature, the "noise" Cook and Dorsey (1977) referred to would certainly occur if none of the literature taught to Black children was Afrocentric, and did not support or reflect their historical and present cultural realities.

One of the most poignant concepts discussed in the chapter was the power of literature to inspire and be the subject matter for writing. Like Hill (1974), whose doctoral dissertation attempted to demonstrate this possibility for African American college students through teaching and experiencing the African aesthetic, Cook supported the position that a particular kind of literature and instructional method could become a weapon to aid in the battle to curtail educational deficits for African American children.

The National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE), in a more direct, but similar vein, released a report in 1984, entitled "Saving the African American Child." The report had been developed by the organization's Task Force on Black Academic and Cultural Excellence, and was written in response to the report prepared by the *National Commission on Excellence,* "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform" (1984).

Although the members of the Federally appointed Commission sent shock-waves throughout the nation's educational arenas and the national media with the release of a twenty-three page final report unequivocally stating that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people" (p. 1); the members of the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE) did not believe that the needs of the African American child were adequately addressed in the document. Like several other organizations throughout the country, they formed a task force to respond to the Commission's report, and to address the country's educational problems from an Afrocentric perspective. Unlike the Commission, they wished to identify the cause of the educational crisis in the African American community, and by extension, in the nation.

The members of NABSE wished to make it very clear to the nation that African Americans would no longer let the government or anyone else define the educational parameters for African American children:

> Our Goals are clear. We have a vision of quality education for the African American child. Our standards are not stated in terms of percentages above or below national test averages. Such 'standards' are far too low and do not deal with additional objectives which we know our children are capable of reaching. Contrary to some professional thinking, the capacity of African American children to learn is intact, in spite of the malignant neglect of our social, educational, and other systems. The major problems are problems of **resources** and the problem with the National, state, and local **will** and **commitment** to ensure that our children's needs are met... **We must never leave the total education of our children in the hands of others!** Since there is a limit to what we can expect from public education, there will remain some things that we must do for ourselves. (NABSE, 1984: 11)

Following the lead of Afrocentric educators, historians, and sociologists [i.e., Hilliard (1984), Asante (1980), Boykin (1985) and Ogbu (1988)], the members of the NABSE Educational Task Force highlighted both the academic and cultural components of the African American child's education, and stressed the necessity of striving for excellence in both arenas. The cultural reference for much of the educational objectives outlined in the report was not just Africa, but the classical African civilization of Ancient Kemet (Egypt). In this respect, they were following the lead of Cheik Anta Diop, the Senegalese scholar who is recognized as the founder of the Afrocentric philosophical theory, and the author of the landmark 1974 publication [English translation of 1955 French original], The African Origin of Civilization.

Citing several sources to document their position, including George James' Stolen Legacy (1976), Chancellor Williams' The Destruction of Black Civilization (1974), J. K. Ngubane's Conflict of Minds (1979), Asa Hilliard's "Pedagogy in Ancient KMT (Egypt) (1986)," and E. W. Blyden's Christianity, Islam and the Negro (1967), they first explained that throughout African history from ancient "prehistoric" times to ancient KMT (Egypt) and throughout the continent, education was an instrument of **survival** and **enrichment** [my emphasis]. Their report further demonstrated that African Americans had never experienced equal education in this country, and that each advance which had been made over the years had only come after fierce struggle and sacrifice. They placed the blame for current educational deficits in the African American child's education on the Western power structure which had deliberately destroyed "all of the ancient highly developed African social institutions in Africa and in the diaspora among enslaved African Americans (especially true for educational institutions)" (p. 16). This was done, the report explained, to protect the institution of slavery in America and colonization in Africa. "Later, to justify brutal treatment of slaves, history would be rewritten to say that our institutions never existed or that they were never developed to any sophisticated level" (p. 16).

Because NABSE did not accept the Commission's definition for excellence in education, they provided their own (African centered) definition. Excellence in education, they declared, "must prepare a student for self-knowledge and to become a contributing problem-solving member of his or her own community and in the wider world as well. No child can be ignorant of or lack respect for his or her own unique cultural group and meet others on an equal footing" (p. 12). Although cultural excellence had not been addressed in the Commission's report, it was considered as significant as academic excellence to the NABSE Task Force. They defined culture as follows:

> Culture consists of behavioral patterns, symbols, institutions, values, and other human made components of society and is the unique achievement of a human group which distinguishes it from other groups... Culture is the sum total of artifacts which accumulate as a group of people struggle for survival and self determination. Survival includes the preservation of one's people and one's self, the reproduction of one's people and one's self, and the care of progeny which result... (p. 12)

Equity was defined as "justice," not sameness, and the kind of education sought would be "true, appropriate, and relevant" (p. 11).

The school curriculum was merely one of many topics covered by the National Alliance of Black School Educator's plan for "Saving the African American Child," and no specific prescriptions or instructional models were provided, but it became very clear that the need for such a model was great. To be truly appropriate and relevant these models must be dictated by Afrocentric paradigms.

Following the release of this report, although there was no large response from the national press or mainstream educational arenas, the members of NABSE, its designated Task Force on Black Academic and Cultural Excellence, as well as African Americans members of the nation's professional educational community responded to the Task Force's challenge from two basic fronts. The first was from within the establishment itself, where African Americans held positions of authority and influence. When subsequent programs were planned or policies debated in response to the Commission's report, the African American perspectives and issues, as outlined in "Saving the African American Child," were included in the dialogue.

This occurred in the state of Pennsylvania when the 1984 *Eastern Pennsylvania Spring Regional Workshop* was planned for educators in that region of the country to address the twin issues of equity and excellence, in response to A Nation at Risk. The objectives of the two day conference were varied, but the tone was set by the keynote speaker for the opening session, Dr. Asa Hilliard, III, Professor in the Departments of Educational Foundations, Counseling/Psychological Services, and Early Childhood Education at Georgia State University [who happened to be a member of the NABSE "Task Force"].

Hilliard's presentation, "Equity and Excellence in a Culturally Diverse Setting," started where "Saving the African American Child" began, and provided a broader historical perspective for all of the various reports which were issued in response to A Nation at Risk. His first task was to provide a foundation from ancient Africa's Nile Valley cultures: the Egyptian Mystery System. This early African education system, he explained, would demonstrate that "what has been recommended in all the reports haven't begun to talk about excellence yet. We have begun to talk about efficiency, but not excellence." He went on to explain that although time would not allow a thorough discussion of this education system, he would pull out the ten virtues that the system attempted to produce. After studying all of the "liberal arts" subjects (grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, and music), an excellent person, with a liberated mind and soul would become virtuous and demonstrate the following behaviors:

1) control of thoughts ("self-discipline")
2) control of actions
3) steadfastness of purpose ("time on task")
4) identity with the spiritual
5) possession of a mission in life
6) sense of call through spiritual order (which compels commitments)
7) freedom from resentment
8) confidence in the power of the master ("teacher")
9) confidence in one's own ability to learn
10) intuitive sense when one is ready to proceed to the next stage of life

These virtues, as Hilliard explained, were a reflection of the Kemetic worldview (Cosmology) and addressed the ultimate aim of this African educational process--to become **god-like**. He suggested that it might be too much to ask the conference participants to make a commitment such as this one, but at least they could be cautious in their future use of the term excellence, and think about the question--What does it **really** mean to us as today's educators? Among the several points presented by Hilliard, his most cogent thesis [to this conference participant] was that the African American child needed an **African**-based term of reference to truly obtain excellence and equity in the nation's educational institutions.

This is a theme which has been explored more and more in recent years by Afrocentric scholars.

The second front that could be utilized to launch a collective attack on the deficiencies in the education of African American children was outside the "mainstream" educational establishment and within a newly created coalition of concerned members of the African American community. To create this new front, "The National Conference on Educating Black Children," a broad representative cross-section of Black organizations, met on September 5-7, 1986, to discuss and respond to five major issue areas which impact the education of African American children: school administrators, teachers, parents, students, and policy-makers [a sixth issue area, "community," was subsequently added].

Conference participants, who gathered from all regions of the country, developed "A Blueprint for Action" to take back to their local communities for introduction and implementation. It was determined that this guideline would be "do-able, implementable, achievable, and succinct." A few of the recommendations which were included in the document to address curricular deficits are:

> 1) Create a classroom environment that is student-centered and enhances student self-concept. Locate and develop self-image building activities.
>
> 2) Build Black History into the total curricular framework of the school system, utilizing models as appropriate.
>
> 3) Identify, collect and utilize model curricula that focus on incorporating Black history, culture and life into the school environment.

> 4) Participate in the selection of textbooks, materials and equipment to ensure high quality, practical value, and representation of the Unites States as a multi-cultural society. [no page Nos.]

Eight months later (May 29-31, 1987) approximately 300 people from 28 different states met in Hunt Valley, Maryland for the "Second Annual (Action Oriented) National Conference on Educating Black Children." In doing so, the participants were joining the Congressional Black Caucus in celebrating its 1987 theme, "The Year of Education of the Black Child." Congressman Augustus Hawkins, then Chair of the Congressional Educational Committee, provided leadership, inspiration, and financial support for the initial national conferences. Regional and state committees and conferences have also been organized and the "Blueprint" has been refined by new input and introduced to school personnel and communities throughout the nation. The most recent national gathering was held in the spring of 1991. The members of these collective thrusts have declared that they will continue to work until their goals are finally achieved and the educational deficits for African American children are eliminated. Not wanting to merely debate or rehash problem areas which have been identified, the challenge "to move the agenda," has been strongly emphasized by the group.

As a result of the continued collective efforts of this predominately African American organization, (and probably because of the powerful federal position held by its leader), the federal government was induced to respond to the specific charges of miseducation of African American children. In 1986 an official study was conducted by the government's Center for Applied

Research and Urban Policy, "in response to a request from the Organizing Committee of the National Conference on Educating Black Children." The director of the center, Dr. Vijaya L. Melnick, after acknowledging the neglect of African American children in previous government studies of national education concerns, she made it clear in the preface of her report that her perspective would be "that of an advocate for the well-being of Black children" (Melnick and Hall, 1986: iii). In other words, her study would to some extent be Afrocentric.

The final published report, which was based on a survey of projects, books, journal articles, conference papers, debates, speeches, and newspaper articles that had addressed the issue of education and African American children in the pass few years, identified many of the problems and proposed solutions. By making this information available, Melnick and Hall's goal was to "make a contribution to the work which must be done to achieve educational equity in America" (Melnick and Hall, 1986: 4). Although the Federal Government still had not taken concrete steps to eradicate educational deficits for African American Children, at-least the Afrocentric individuals who held positions of authority in this arena had forced the recognition of these educational inequities which had existed for so many years.

In 1990, another landmark publication, Infusion of African American Content in the School Curriculum, edited by Hilliard, Payton-Stewart, and Williams, was published. The work was subtitled, "Proceedings of the First National Conference, October 1989." The aim of both the publication and the conference which inspired it was to help provide some of the missing content that had been produced over the past 100 years by committed scholars, yet had not been made readily available to educators who wished to teach the African and African American experience in world history so "it tells the story of a **people**, not the story of isolated heroes and events. We want teachers to be able to tell an integrated story of continental and diasporan African people as it has evolved over time. It is this comprehensive story of African people that has affected world history and which is to be woven into the general school curriculum" (pp. vii-viii).

One of the papers presented at the conference, and subsequently included in the publication under the subsection "Theory and Rationale," was Ramona Edelin's "Curriculum and Cultural Identity." Edelin is the President and Executive Officer of The National Coalition and her major thesis was that "the key to unlocking the genius of African American children is found in the relationship of curriculum to cultural identity" (p. 37). The greatest problem preventing the collective educational advancement of our children, she contends, is the group's lack of **cultural integrity,** which she identified as the key ingredient needed to define and move a group forward. This void in cultural integrity, she posited, may not be exclusively attributed to centuries of enslavement, racism, sharecropping, and the accompanying ills of poverty and second class citizenship, for the forefathers and foremothers of modern generations managed to maintain their cultural integrity by resisting the systematic assaults on their dignity and humanity and persisting to advance the group in spite of these constraints. Edelin emphasized that this must happen once again, if the next generation is not going to self-destruct. She contended that the major question which must be answered today is, Why are so many of our children geniuses in the streets and functional illiterates in the classrooms, test sites, and personnel offices? The answer and the basic cause of the negative changes can be traced to the African American's loss of control of the kind of education proscribed for our youth following the hard fought battle for school desegregation. To return to the educational cultural integrity, and subsequently, the educational excellence of the past, Edelin called for a paradigm shift which would not only overturn European cultural hegemony by crafting African-centered curricula, but which would actually teach students **to think** differently. Like Hilliard, Asante, Karenga, Diop, and other Afrocentrists, Edelin referred educators and others concerned with saving the next generations of African American children to Ancient Kemet (Egypt) for cultural and educational paradigms (pp. 39-45).

Although Edlin's conference presentation did not provide a specific curriculum model based on classical African civilization, this was provided very explicitly by Wade Nobles, who also explored the role of culture in education. His theme was "The Infusion of African and African-American Content: A Question of Content and Intent." After reiterating the fact that this infusion process by definition was Afrocentric, he presented the ancient Kemetic Cardinal Virtues of **Ma'at,** which governed both curricular content and intent: Truth, Justice, Righteousness, Harmony, Balance, Propriety, and Order. Excellence, he explained, was attained by focusing on a particular attitude and method for education, which included Character, Commitment and Consciousness on the elementary level; and Reading, Writing and Arithmetic on the secondary level.

With this foundation, the Afrocentric **Goal of Education** (harmony, understanding and enlightenment) is to assist in the development of a child who is:

1. COMPETENT: demonstrates a level of a skill indicative that s/he has the ability to do something well (human conduct)

2. CONFIDENT: Exhibits an attitude and approach to life which reflects the belief that s/he is capable of doing anything (social responsibility)

3. CONSCIOUS: Has an awareness of who s/he is, their purpose and path to fulfillment (moral character).

The process of education in this classical model was multi-dimensional, in the sense that it was not only seen as acquiring knowledge, but as "a PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION of the learner, who progressed through successive stages of **re-birth to become** EXCELLENT [Godlike]." (Nobles, 1990: 13)

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

None of the presentations at this first national conference dedicated to the infusion of African and African American content in the school curriculum specifically addressed the requirements for teaching Black Literature from an Afrocentric perspective. However, the over-arching goal of the conference, as well as that of individual presenters, who must be counted among the the growing number of professional and non-professional educators committed to moving beyond the mere delineation of educational deficits for African American children, was to look backward to African history and culture to find a proper foundation for building, reconstructing, and/or reshaping a new educational reality for African American youth.

Their work, like my own in this dissertation, is not a new beginning. It is simply a continuation of a process which began many years before the advent of the American Black Power/Black Arts Revolution of the 1960's; but a process which received guidance and redirection from the men and women of this tumultuous era who emerged as leaders. Collectively and individually they were determined to help African Americans discover or recreate a truly African-centered reality. The language may have changed over the years, but the main goal of **survival** is the same today as it was in the 1960's, and as it had been throughout the previous three centuries of African history in the diaspora.

The Afrocentric consciousness which was apparent, though unnamed as such in the early writings of the Black Arts Movement, has become increasingly apparent and clearly delineated in scholarly literature of the last decade. In recent months a debate has even moved into the media and other popular forums directed specifically to the African American community, and toward the general American public as well (Petrie, 1991; Jenifer, 1991; Newsweek, 1991, Sept. 23 cover story; Dent, 1991; Y.S.B., 1991, October cover story; and Collins,1991). Various issues have been raised in this debate over the so-called "true meaning" of Afrocentricism and an Afrocentric education. A number of questions have also been raised: How does this differ from multiculturalism? Is this really the answer for African American children, or is it racism, separatism, or a new version of Black Nationalism and the 1960's Black Power Movement? (Ravitch, 1990; Asante, 1991b; Hirsch, 1987; Bloom, 1987; Banks, 1991/92) The "storm" which Cobbs tried to explain to the education community in 1969, seems to have returned once again. The reality, as the literature discussed in this study indicates, is that the struggle for educational change, fairness, and equity for African American students has never stopped. More than twenty years ago Cobbs wrote that this particular struggle had been ongoing for more that 100 years; in fact, since the Civil War had officially destroyed the American institution of slavery and the African American's battles for "a proper education" and full class citizenship moved to the forefront of their agenda for survival in what remained a hostile environment.

The Black Power/Black Arts Movement of the 1960's and 70's merely provided a much needed transfusion for the necessary strategic planning and theory building which followed. In later years, when the Federal government refused to respond to warnings made by scholars such as Cobbs, to address the needs of African American children as if they were a national priority, many of the individuals who had been leaders, participants, or simply beneficiaries of this social/cultural and political movement, joined forces with similarly minded colleagues and associates to keep the struggle alive. Even though their efforts rarely made the front pages of the national media, or appeared in popular journals and magazines, the diverse literature included in this study reinforces this reality.

Some of these individuals became or continued their efforts as authors of literature for children and young adults. These efforts and their works (some of which will be discussed in the subsequent chapters) were as much a part of this collective struggle to improve the education of the African American child as the efforts of individuals who formed the *Association of Black Psychologists*, the *National Association of Black School Educators*, the *Black Caucus of the National Council of Teachers of English*, the *National Conference on Educating Black Children*, and the *National Conference for the Infusion of African American Content in the School Curriculum*.

Some of the necessary next steps which must be taken to continue to move the educational agenda for African American youth include the analysis and synthesis of literature which addresses their educational needs. This would reveal the Afrocentric themes, paradigms, and prescriptions outlined in various works from the past two decades; and the third step would be to apply these African centered perspectives to the actual task of infusing the curriculum with appropriate content and identifying the best possible instructional methods for all children, but particularly for African American children. In this three-part study I have included all three of these necessary steps--literature analysis, synthesis, and application.

CHAPTER 3

EVOLUTION OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERARY TRADITION

> Although the study of Afro-American literature is not as old as the material itself, it is not significantly younger than the formal study of American literature, which has earned academic respectability in this country only within the past eighty years... In short, long before some of today's teachers were born, black American literature had been read, taught, and, too often, forgotten. (Turner, 1971: 4-5)

INTRODUCTION

In 1985, Beryl Banfield, President of the Council on Interracial Books for Children and professor of education, contributed a chapter to MacCann and Woodard's publication, The Black American in Books for Children. The title of her chapter, "An Historical Examination of Racism in Children's Books, from an Afro-American Perspective," established the fact that Banfield was centering her discourse within the African American experience, and therefore, within her own racial, historical, and cultural reality. As a strong advocate of bias-free literature for all children and an experienced educator, she also grounded her remarks on the following four basic premises:

> 1. Literature and textbooks reflect the values of a society and serve to perpetuate and reinforce these values.
>
> 2. Every intellectual discipline, i.e., the social sciences, philosophy, is pressed into service to provide the theoretical and "scientific" support for these values.
>
> 3. Educational institutions play a critical role in the reinforcement and perpetuation of these values, first, by the socialization of teachers and students so that they internalize these values and, second, by the cultivation and development of scholars who will continue to present theoretical arguments in support of these values in increasingly sophisticated ways.
>
> 4. Every form of communications media is utilized to guarantee the widest possible dissemination of those ideas considered valid and desirable by society.
>
> (Banfield,1985c: 23)

Although Banfield's premises were drawn from her broad educational and personal experiences, these premises are also very much in accord with the **Afrocentric paradigms** (i.e., the "basic assumption or guides which helps to organize our view, speaks directly to the needs of African American children, and destroys false perceptions when necessary") found in the diverse pedagogical literature written in the past two decades to address the educational needs or deficits of African American children. An historical overview of the African American literary tradition, including an examination of the racism found in the Euro-American literary tradition, such as the one provided by Banfield, must be understood and considered if one is to select, evaluate, and develop instructional strategies for teaching black literature to today's elementary and secondary grade students. An approach such as this one is necessary because Black or Afrocentric literature for children evolved from both of these traditions--African American and European American. Whether a particular literary work was written prior to or following the the late 1960's and early 1970's Black Power/Black Arts Movement in the United States, it would not matter. Significant historical, social, cultural, and political realities of the period would have helped to shape this particular classification of literature (children's, young adult, or juvenile), just as they impacted all other genres.

OLD WORLD TRADITIONS SHAPE NEW WORLD REALITY

The United States, Banfield contends, is an excellent model for an historical examination of a racist society, because the history of this nation has continuously reflected racism from the moment Christopher Columbus accidently arrived on the shores of North America in 1492, until today (1985c: 24). This regional and later national characteristic flowered with the subsequent migration of English settlers who perceived and treated Native Americans and

Africans as inferior species of humankind, while they accepted as fact a belief in their own innate superiority.

In the years before the Civil War, the African American was frequently included as a character in the literary debate which raged throughout the nation over the issue of slavery; but according to Brown, the "Negro" which appeared in the literature of this era was a mere pawn of the pro-slavery advocates and the abolitionists. There were no honest characterizations of Africans and Americans of African ancestry, only crude sentimentalizing, melodrama, propaganda, and above all else, racism in its least subtle forms (Brown, 1968). In an attempt to justify the southern plantation system and the "peculiar institution of slavery" (Stampp, 1956) which evolved in the United Stated following the American Revolution, to themselves, to northern abolitionists, to the Africans they had enslaved, and to slavery critics throughout the so-called civilized world; Southerners created well-developed racist stereotypes to depict the African. These stereotypes became so deeply entrenched in the regional psyche that by the early years of the nineteenth century they were reflected in all aspects of Southern life (Logan, 1954).

AMERICAN "PLANTATION" LITERATURE

The three basic myths which emerged asserted that blacks were by intellect and temperament naturally suited to be the slaves of whites; that the African had been designated by the Creator to serve in this inferior station; and that rigid discipline and severe controls were necessary and beneficial to the "African barbarian" (Banfield, 1985c: 24). As a growing body of "plantation literature" developed with its ever-recurring themes depicting slavery as a natural, pastoral way of life, which supposedly benefitted and was appreciated by the enslaved African, more specific stereotypes evolved as well. African American critic Sterling A. Brown described these additional contrived depictions as "the Contented Slave and his corollary, the Wretched Freedman; and the Comic Negro--the buffoon, the ridiculous, the posturing, the hopelessly inept" (Brown, 1933: 182). Just as every story of plantation life could not have been complete without the "old marse," the essence of chivalry; "young missy," 100% southern womanhood, purity and the essence of charm; and "young marse," chip off the old block, the essence of courage and dash; there also had to be the proscribed Negro [African American] characters. These included the black "mammy," who felt personal pride in her white family's home and their children, whom she raised with love and tenderness as if they were her own; and the black male counterpart in this scenario, who was also devoted to his white folks and took great pride in serving them while taking care of their belongings as if they were his own. In addition, there was the inevitable black clown character--"a watermelon-eating, razor-carrying, singer and dancer who mispronounced big words that were readily used, but not understood" (Brown, 1968: 567-568).

The fact that this clown character subsequently became one of the most famous figures in popular American theatrical productions called **minstrel shows**, helps to explain how Banfield's fourth premise (above), that "every form of communications media is utilized to guarantee the widest possible dissemination of those ideas considered valid and desirable by a society," may be generalized to include other aspects of a society's cultural institutions as well. Many other aspects of popular American culture also served this same reinforcing role. What first appeared on the printed page was later seen on the stage, and subsequently, on the large screens of movie theaters, followed by the smaller but more intimate family television screens. The minstrel show and theatrical tradition which developed in the United States has been described as the one uniquely American contribution to the popular theater of the nineteenth century--"that grotesque concoction of song, dance, and theatrical comedy organized around the thick-lipped, wooly-wigged image of the banjo-plunking minstrel clown" (Engle, 1978: xiv). This comic image of the African American male was perpetuated through this era's very popular national and international cultural forum, but continued in subsequent eras as if it were an image drawn from reality. In actually, it had merely evolved from the mythical characters invented by Southern authors who first developed literature in the "plantation tradition."

For more than forty years this highly stylized variety show, with white-created images, and white maintained structures that caricatured and demeaned the African American, was quite ironically, the first avenue of entry into the mainstream (white) American stage for the African American performer. To participate in this arena of American life, the black male and female were forced to "bring to life" the very images which demeaned and stereotyped their individual, racial, and communal self-images. Cultural historian Nathan Huggins explained how minstrel characters, though created by talented whites such as showman Thomas D. Rice, the first great star of blackface entertainment, became the only "stage Negroes" which were acceptable to white audiences, and therefore, the only ones considered commercially viable. Unless these characters followed the patterns outlined in the old plantation tradition tales, the only other acceptable option was to broaden the caricature even further at the expense of Africans and their ancestors:

> The audience (one should say popular culture) had ingrained in its imagination a view of the Negro that was comic and pathetic. The theatrical darky was childlike; he could be duped into the most idiotic and foolish schemes...His songs were vulgar and his stories the most gross and broad; his jokes were often on himself, his wife or his woman. Lazy, he was slow of movement ...nevertheless, he was unrestrained in enthusiasm for music --for athletic and rhythmical dance. Likewise, he was insatiable in his bodily appetites; his songs and his tales about food... This character was patently the antithesis of the Protestant Ethic, as was the Negro stereotype. (Huggins, 1971: 250-251)

In her historical examination of the American literary tradition, Banfield identified one of the most highly celebrated early American writers, Edgar Allen Poe, as one who wrote in the plantation literature tradition. Because of the enduring popularity of this writer and his works, which have often been labeled "American classics," she felt that it was important to explain the "devastating impact made upon the the minds and souls of white and black students," (p. 26) who for years had been forced to read works such as Poe's prize winning [awarded a major literary prize in 1843] "The Gold Bug," because their teachers either did not recognize Poe's characters as racist stereotypes because these images had already been internalized in the values of the society, or because the educators simply did not care.

Poe, who apparently made no secret of his own racism and belief in the inferiority of African peoples, created black characters in his tale "The Gold Bug," which "carried the stereotype of the Contented Slave--the faithful, stupid black servant and the Comic Negro to the ultimate racism" (Banfield, 1985c: 26). Unfortunately this work and others like it were taught for generations to adolescent children in this country. Although Poe died in 1849, more than a decade before the the United States experienced the brutal Civil War which ultimately destroyed the nation's legal system of enforced servitude, the racial stereotypes and false images created to justify this immoral institution continue to to be offered to the American public. In 1981, Poe's "Gold Bug," along with other tales written by this celebrated American author, was adapted by Elaine Kirn and released by Regent Publishing Company.

In the years following the Civil War and the Reconstruction Period, writings in the plantation tradition grew by leaps and bounds as the nation's literary consciousness expanded to reflect the political, social, and economic concerns of the times. The plantation tradition, which had initially represented the works and themes of a few Southern writers, became a national pattern, reinforced and equally supported by Northern and Southern magazines, literary journals, newspapers, and books. African American historian Rayford Logan called this period of African American history "The Nadir (1877-1901)," in The Betrayal of the Negro (1954). This book provided a well-documented account of the vast national conspiracy which Logan posits occurred in the years between the 1877 election of Rutherford B. Hayes to the Presidency of the United States and the early years of the next century. To heal the wounds of the divided nation and advance the national agenda of establishing a firm economic base, a "compromise," according to Logan, was made by the power brokers of the day at the expense of the newest citizen of the country--the African American. The promise of Reconstruction, along with the federal troops, was withdrawn from the Southern states. A new form of slavery was quickly legislated in its place. To justify the designation of second-class citizenship, increased violence and systematic loss of rights for the African American, the old myths, stereotypes, and character assassinations were recreated over and over again and fed to the reading public.

Brown (1968), Logan (1954), Long and Collier (1972) and Banfield (1985c) each identified Southern writers Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page as leaders in perpetuating and expanding the negative stereotypes of African peoples which were typical in the plantation literary tradition. The literary creations of these authors were published in Northern magazines and served to authenticate the derogatory images initially created by slavery apologists and imitated by countless others, since these Southerners supposedly were "experts" on the subjects they were depicting. Both men had been children when the Civil War began, and had vivid, though obviously distorted, memories of their grandfathers who represented familiar examples of the genteel plantation "masters" portrayed in their works. Quite naturally their rose-colored childhood memories would not include realistic visions of this brutal, inhumane system of human exploitation; and as a result these more realistic images of slavery were never presented in their writing. They chose instead to portray their black characters as contented and happy with the protection their slave status provided, and generally opposed to freedom.

Banfield referred to one juvenile book written by Page, The Two Little Confederates (1888), which was first published during this period, and reissued in 1976, by Garland Publishing as a "classic" in children's literature. Like so many works of its type, it also depicted enslaved African Americans as "contented, freedom-fearing, and dependent" on their white owners who loved and treated their slaves as if they were members of their own families. The children of the late 20th century gained no better understanding of the national tragedy caused by the American institution of slavery than did the Post-Reconstruction generations. The fact that this work was reissued, along with the equally racist book by Anne F. Johnson, The Little Colonel (1896), following the Black Power Movement in the United States which documented the psychological damage caused by the racism which shaped the national literary tradition, merely attests to the persistence and depth of this belief once it has become part of a society's value system [Banfield's first premise].

Johnson's book was later popularized in the Shirley Temple, "Little Colonel" movie of the same name. Once Temple's very popular films were transferred from the big screen to children's television programming, new generations [including my own] of black and white children were spoon-fed this popular, but equally distorted image of a brilliant and talented, blond-haired, blue-eyed child who behaved kindly, yet paternalistically, towards the African American men, women, and children she encountered in her various adventures. The very talented African American dancer and actor, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, frequently appeared in these films as Temple's "smiling, genial, dancing, faithful family retainer" (Banfield. 1985c: 28).

In the fifth edition of Southerland, Arbuthnot, and Hill's Children and Books (1977), Joel Chandler Harris' nineteenth century collection of African American folktales, Nights With Uncle Remus (1883), was listed along with other works as one of the "milestones" in the development of children's literature:

> These are individual books that were turning points in children's literature. They not only carry us into the 20th century, but their influence is discernable in the writing today... From the Uncle Remus collections their came a new consciousness of the United States as a repository of regional and racial folklore. (p.53)

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: AFRICAN AMERICAN FOLKLORE, POETRY, ESSAY and BIOGRAPHY

There may have been a new consciousness of regional folklore in the United States following the Civil War, but this new American consciousness included a distorted depiction of the African American and the rich oral folk tradition (i.e., storytelling) which had served as one of the many tools of cultural and spiritual survival for Africans in the diaspora:

> The role of their rabbit in the tales of the American Negro is similar to that of the hare in African folk narratives--that of the trickster who shrewdly outwits and gains a victory over some physically stronger or more powerful adversary. The animal tales told by Negro slaves with Brer Rabbit as the hero had a meaning far deeper than mere entertainment. The rabbit actually symbolized the slave himself. (Brewer, 1968: 3)

Harris, like his contemporary Page, was unable to tell the true story of the African American, for he never actually realized that the black perspective and the white perspective have often been quite different. In spite of the longevity of Page and Harris' popularity, it would still take African American writers, such as nineteenth century author **Charles Chesnutt** and twentieth century authors, Zora Neale Hurston and Julius Lester, to reveal the real spirit and essence of the African and African American folk traditions.

> ...Charles Wadell Chesnutt was concerned with the harsher--and more typical--aspects of life in the South, and with the problems of the color line. His volume of folk tales (The Conjure Woman, 1899) seems to resemble the tales of Page and Harris, but on close reading Chesnutt is quite different. His tales are told by a shrewd, self-serving Uncle, whose characterizations of both Negroes and whites is salty--and no nonsense about the good old days. (Brown, 1968: 572)

In the years following the Reconstruction new stereotypes of the African freedman emerged and were combined with the older plantation stereotypes in the literature published in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Brown described these new issues as the Brute Negro and the Tragic Mulatto. Authors such as Thomas Page "contrasted the old issue Negro, loyal and contented (in Page's version), with the new issue, who were disloyal, ungrateful, and discontented, ruined by emancipation" (Brown:1968: 569). Although Chesnutt was the first African American to gain stature as a writer of fiction in this country, he was by no means the first to use the pen as a weapon to attack the majority culture's racist institutions, actions and creations (including literary ones) which threatened the survival of enslaved Africans and their descendants. Even though they had to overcome an alien language, culture, customs, and eventually laws created to keep them illiterate and servile, the Africans in America began to define their own reality and transform their own historic literary tradition (i.e., African) as early as 1746, when **Lucy Terry**, an enslaved African woman living in Deerfield, Massachusetts wrote "Bars Fight," a poem which described a local Indian raid. The next milestone in this evolving tradition occurred in 1760, when **Jupiter Hammond,** an enslaved African living in another New England colony published "An Evening Thought," his first collection of poems; followed by the young African girl **Phyllis Wheatly**, who was considered a child prodigy when she became the first African in America to publish a book of poetry a few years after she was stolen from her native land and forced into servitude by a "Christian" family residing in colonial America.

There were very few poets of any hue creating verse in the pre-Revolutionary War years of this English colony. The fact that Hammond, Terry, Wheatly, and the other Africans which followed were able to accomplish this unique achievement was astounding. At the same time they accomplish their literary feats, European colonists, whose power gave them the authority to shape the traditions, values, and laws of the new nation, not only denied the mental capabilities of Africans, but the humanity of their race as well. In subsequent years these black authors and their creations would be pointed to as evidence of the injustice in the claims of innate African inferiority.

African American scholars such as Long and Collier (1972) suggest that the real literary substance of African American letters did not emerge until the years between the development of the cotton kingdom and the Civil War, in the form of anti-slavery protests. Writings by free African Americans such as **David Walker,** who published his Appeal in 1829; and **Henry Highland Garnet**, whose essay, "An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America," were written in such eloquent, direct, and uncompromising terms that they were either outlawed by frightened whites (i.e., the Appeal), or side stepped by a convention of free Blacks for being too daring in its call for insurrection of their brothers and sisters held in bondage. (Long and Collier, 1972: 9)

The most common form of writing which evolved during these early years in the development of an African American literary tradition was the slave narrative--the life story of men and women who challenged an institution, and unveiled the lies, myths, and stereotypes created to sustain the vile system; while affirming the African's love of liberty and their determination to survive in the face of continuing oppression. While these efforts were not originally directed to a juvenile audience of any race, they would remain as a primary source and clear historical record for future generations. What better evidence could be provided to explode myths about the American period of slavery for secondary students, and to demonstrate the Africans determination to be free, have a voice of their own, and tell their own story to future generation?.

The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano was the first widely read autobiography by a African who had been captured and enslaved in the United States. It was first published in 1789, and provided a first hand **African-centered** account of African society and the brutality of the European slave traders who invaded this world to steal and barter for human chattel. Equiano's eyewitness account challenged white readers to rethink their stereotypes of Africans as subhuman and whites as God's chosen (Andrews, 1992).

One of the leading voices of the African American literary tradition and "the most brilliant figure to emerge in the struggle against slavery was **Frederick Douglass**" (Long and Collier, 1972: 11). Douglass was born in bondage in the Southern United States, but escaped to freedom in the North to write and tell the world his own interpretation of "the peculiar institution of slavery," in two versions of his biography, the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, in 1845, and My Bondage and My Freedom, in 1855. Douglass' poignant revelations about the brutality and inhumanity of the American institution of slavery made him a leading spokesman in the abolitionist speakers circuit.

Although the literary efforts of females in general at this time (19th century), and females of African ancestry in particular, were not given the same attention or significance as the writings of men, Mary Helen Washington recently edited a collection of narratives of black women from 1866 to 1960, Invented Lives, which demonstrates that the black female has not only helped to shape the African American literary tradition, but has done so with the dual burdens of sexual and racial discrimination. Unfortunately, the African American male, while fighting to refute the white-invented myths and stereotypes which demeaned **all** African peoples, followed in the white man's traditional pattern of discriminating against their women. Washington describes how deeply entrenched American sexism had become in late 19th century African American life in the following passage:

> In the early 1890's when a number of leading black intellectuals decided to form 'an organization of colored authors, scholars, and artists'...one of the invited members wrote to declare himself 'decidedly opposed to the admission of women to membership because literary matters and social matters do not mix'... Imagine if you can, black women intellectuals and activists, who in the 1890's had taken on such issues as moral integrity of black women, lynching, and the education of black youth, being considered social decorations. (Washington, 1988: xvii)

The persistent presence of sexism in the general American cultural reality and in its male-dominated literary and critical tradition, is perhaps even more significant when one considers the possible impact this reality had on the subsequent development of a body of juvenile literature suitable for African American youth. Since the black female has always been the foremost advocate and protector of the black child, it is quite probable that the black women who emerged in later years as champions of this literary genre had to overcome tremendous obstacles to accomplish this feat.

Gertrude Bustill Mossell, a nineteenth century educator, journalist and author, was one of many African American females who made outstanding contributions during her life time (1855-1948) to the African American community, especially in Philadelphia where she lived most of her life, and to the broader community as well; yet her name and her many deeds are rarely mentioned in the historical records of this period. This omission exists even though "Mossell was one of the best known black female journalists of her day, writing not only for the national black newspapers but also for local and national white newspapers. For a number of years she was editor of the 'Woman's Department' of the New York Age, and wrote articles for the Indianapolis World, the Philadelphia Inquirer, the Philadelphia Press, and the Philadelphia Times, the Rakin Institute, the Independent, the Press Republican, the Boston Advocate, the Women's Era, and Our Women and Children" (Center for African American History and Culture, 1992).

In 1894, Gertrude Mossell, who was married to the highly respected African American physician and founder of the Frederick Douglass Hospital in Philadelphia, Nathan F. Mossell, published a book about the achievements of black women. The Work of the Afro-American Woman, with its black and feminist viewpoint, was well received in both the African American and white press. The first edition sold more than 1000 copies, and was immediately reissued with five times as many copies printed. A few years later Mossell published a book for children, Little Dansies' One Day at Sabbath School (1902). Little is known about this publication, but she was undoubtedly one of the earliest African American females to use her literary talents to write a book with an African American child as the central character.

In spite of the restrictions imposed on African American artists in this society, various gifted individuals of African ancestry continued to emerge from the race to challenge the myths and negative stereotypes accepted as reality through their own creative and innate genius. **Paul Lawrence Dunbar** was one such star who emerged from an oppressed life in America's post Civil War period, to become an internationally famous poet. Dunbar was born in Dayton, Ohio, in 1872, during the last years of Southern

Reconstruction. Like Phyllis Wheatley, his literary talents were recognized at a very early age. To find the literary success he longed for, he had to work at what ever menial jobs he could find, and when he did write, he had to tailor his creations to the norms considered acceptable by the white reading public--"darky talk," a contrived, patchwork dialect supposedly imitative of black speech:

> Although Dunbar was a highly talented lyricist ...his writing took on the configuration imposed upon it by the necessity to survive in a white literary world...He wrote dialect pieces to gain an audience, knowing the fad exploited by Thomas Nelson Page, Joel Chandler Harris, and other white apologists for slavery. (Long and Collier, 1972: 214)

Instead of the serious portrayals of black characters, which were unacceptable to whites, Dunbar wrote and received accolades for dialect poems which revealed "the simple pleasures and sorrows of a childlike people who could be comical or pathetic--seldom anything else" (Long and Collier, 1972: 215). Through the standard English verse, which he preferred over the dialect, he expressed his true emotions, and revealed his full understanding of the self-protective steps necessary for the survival of an African American in the white-controlled world of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. One of his most well-known poems, which is frequently quoted by African Americans, is the following:

We Wear the Mask

We wear the mask that grins and lies
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,-
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,

And mouth with myriad subtleties.
Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To Thee from tortured should arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile.
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask. (Dunbar, 1972: 112-113)
First published in 1895, in Majors and Minors.

By donning this mask--this stereotype, Dunbar was not only able to leave his elevator job and support himself through his special gift of writing, but he was also able to put one more dent in the 'white wall' that attempted to keep the black artist out of the literary mainstream. He was another link in the growing Black literary tradition.

African American social anthropologist St. Clair Drake has used the term "vindicationist" to describe scholarly research and literature written from a black perspective to serve as a corrective to the myths, stereotypes and racial biases included in the vast majority of research and writings created by Europeans and Euro-Americans. He identifies **W.E.B. DuBois** as a leading African American intellectual of the 20th century who dedicated a lifetime of scholarship to setting the record straight by exploding the lies, omissions, and distortions of the African and African American's history and culture, and doing so in a true "vindicationist" tradition. (Drake, 1987: xvii)

While DuBois was one of the leading luminaries of the African American intellectual community who proposed from the beginning that the American Negro Academy--a kind of think tank for the intellectual black elite called the Talented Tenth--be opened only to men of African descent (Washington, 1987); he was also the foremost champion of his entire race and the author of a publication which became a classic in the African American literary tradition--Souls of Black Folk (1903). Through this collection of social essays, poetry, short stories and African American musical lyrics, DuBois defined the problem of the twentieth century as "the problem of the color line." In this collection he created "an assessment of a people which has been defined as a precursor of modern sociological and historical thought--fifty years years ahead of its time" (Hare, 1969: xiii).

Souls of Black Folk and another classic in the American literary tradition, Booker T. Washington's autobiography, Up From Slavery, were representative of the two of the most common modes of Black writing which emerged from the African American community during this era--simplistic and oracular. Long and Collier define the life story as indicative of the simplistic mode, while Souls fits the more complex oracular mode:

> Up From Slavery is filled with simplistic themes: uprightness, cleanliness, mother-love. It is optimistic. All will be well, though the where, when, and how are only obscurely hinted at...
> In the Souls of Black Folk ...all is complex; the canvas is crowded. The very language of DuBois, modeled on nineteenth-

> century rhetoric, is intended to suggest the manifold dimensions of the Afro-American experience (Long and Collier, 1972: 3).

By the turn of the 20th century the United States had joined the imperialistic powers of the world and had acquired an empire composed primarily of darker people--Polynesian, Japanese, Chinese, and others. In doing so, she had closely followed the "prevailing pattern of imperialism that had swept the world: the injection of the spirit of industrialism into a program to dominate the backward areas of the world. Invariably, these backward peoples were dark; and frequently, they were Negroid" (Franklin, 1967: 416). To justify their expansionist actions, the United States, along with the great powers of Europe, who had effectively divided Africa by this time, argued that some races were inherently incapable of self-government, therefore it was the "duty" of the Anglo-Saxons to protect the "lesser races" from self destruction. Social Darwinism had provided ready and seemingly invincible arguments to support this doctrine; and "by the time of the Spanish-American War (1898), the idea of race superiority had deeply penetrated nearly every field--biology, sociology, history, literature, and political science" (Gossett, 1963: 311).

DuBois' 1903 publication of Souls of Black Folk also served as a reaffirmation of the the African and African American's humanity, beauty and cultural strengths, during this "nadir" or low point in their world-wide political, social, and economic reality:

> I heard in these days [1885-1888], while a student in Nashville,Tennessee] for the first time the Negro songs...I was

> thrilled and moved to tears and seemed
> to recognize something inherently and
> deeply my own. I was glad to go to Fisk.
> (DuBois,1968: 23)

In addition, the book established the undisputed fact that the "accommodationist" point of view espoused by Booker T. Washington, the highly respected [by blacks and whites alike] conservative leader of the African American community, provided only one component of the multi-faceted black perspective, and its constantly evolving literary tradition:

> Since the newly acclaimed 'leader of the Negroes' had accepted an inferior status for Negroes, and since the opposition of the few who did not was drowned by the praise lavished upon Washington, America seemed at the turn of the century to have resolved to the satisfaction of all...The principles of Democracy did not have to be applied to all Americans. (Logan, 1970: 88)

DuBois challenged Washington's apparent acceptance of second class citizenship in his "Atlanta Compromise Speech" delivered in 1895, the growing violence against African Americans through out the nation, and the South's legally endorsed separation and disfranchisement of his people. DuBois was only 35 years old when this book was written, but for the next 60 years he would continuously make his imprint on the evolving black literary tradition--a tradition which had been used from its very beginning in this country as a weapon in the continuous struggle for black liberation. In 1906, DuBois organized a group of Black men who were opposed to the growth of of Washington's "Tuskegee Machine," and the government's practice of strangling honest criticism against it. In Dusk of Dawn (1940), DuBois explained how this "machine" worked. It was the government's attempt, through financial support or nonsupport, to make Washington the **only** spokesman for all of black America. This would make the South happy, and if the South was happy Northern and Southern business interests would continue to profit. DuBois described how Washington's supporters controlled any possible opposition to Washington's acceptable point of view:

> No Negro institution could collect funds without the recommendation or acquiescence of Mr. Washington. Few political appointments were made anywhere in the United States without his consent, etc. (DuBois, 1940: 73)

DuBois' new group called itself the "Niagara Movement" and took the radical step of demanding that the United States live up to her Constitution and grant African Americans (Negroes) the same rights granted to other citizens. Three years later this group allied itself with a group of white liberals who wanted to do something about the growing violence against Negroes. They held a conference in 1909, and formed the *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*. DuBois was elected director of publicity and research and became the editor of Crisis, the organization's literary magazine which was formed the following year. He held this position for the next 24 years and through its editorial pages, his many ideas and opinions were voiced for the world to read.

In her historical overview Banfield identified the first quarter of the 20th century as the most critical period to examine for its

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impact on the development of children's literature and textbooks. This was due, she explained, to the "scientific theories," grounded in racist assumptions, which first appeared during these years and became deeply imbedded in the warp and woof of the total society:

> It was in the period when social Darwinism which celebrated the 'survival of the fittest' and the concepts of the 'white man's burden' and 'manifest destiny' were all advanced to justify colonialist expansion and oppression of people of colour abroad, and quickly utilized to defend racial oppression within the United States. (Banfield,1985c: 30-31)

The advent and participation of over 350,000 African Americans in World War I, the failure of crops and the increasing violence against Blacks in the South, the need for Black labor in Northern was industry, the migration of thousands of blacks from the South and West Indies, the increase in the African American's educational level, the Garvey Movement and new-found race pride, the development of Black newspapers and magazines, the advent of the white "roaring twenties" and the white man's need to let go of this puritanism, and certain important Black leaders who coaxed it into being, all played vital parts in the creation of the so-called Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's.

When the war ended, America was a new country in many respects. Violence typical of the South had spread to the North, but with one big difference--Black folk were fighting back as they never had before and protesting louder than ever against it. They did not ask the government to do something to stop it, they demanded it.

Too many African American men had lost their lives in France fighting valiantly for freedom to come home to be lynched by their own countrymen. African Americans had become world-wise and city-wise. They were forming organizations, reading and writing books, magazines, and newspapers.

> By the end of World War I, 220 newspapers and 230 religious, fraternal, college and miscellaneous periodicals were published by Negroes... these vehicles of communication were helpful in enlightening and unifying Negroes. (Oak,1948: 125-126)

This change in personality was not restricted to African Americans. The horror of war had also effected the psyche of many whites. They no longer had to completely vilify or strip the African of his humanity to glorify their own egos. Several white writers attempted for the first time to write honest portrayals on blacks. This would have been literary suicide a few years earlier because no self-respecting (economy minded) publisher or magazine would have touched it. What began in the dramatic world with Ridgely Torrence and Eugene O'Neil, spread to other genre. White America caught the "Negro fad" and wanted to read more by and about Negroes.

THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE (1919-1929)

Thanks to African American intellectuals such as Alain Locke, James Weldon Johnson, Jessie Fauset, Charles S. Johnson, and W.E.B. DuBois, a new generation of dynamic, young, Black writers had been brought into the public eye. They had been encouraged to create and they had. They came from all over the country [and the Caribbean as well] and made Harlem, the home of Crisis and Opportunity magazines their cultural haven. With the promise of opportunities to have their poems, short stories, plays and essays read and critiqued by concerned, experienced, and supportive black intellectuals; the possibility of receiving public recognition and winning prizes for their writings; and most of all, the possibility of coming to Harlem to be a part of what seemed to be the most exciting place in the world for a would-be artist of African ancestry; the black literary tradition grew and flourished through their creations.

Recognizing the special needs of African American children whose young sensibilities were continually assaulted by the American literary tradition, DuBois used his position as Director of Publicity for the N.A.A.C.P. to create "**The Brownies' Book:** A Monthly Magazine for Children of the Sun." From 1920 to 1921, the former teacher who became literary editor of the Crisis, Jessie Fauset, also served as literary and managing editor of The Brownies Book. She contributed several poems and short stories to the publication during its short tenure. Unable to make a financial success of the children's magazine, it was discontinued after a year.

In addition to contributions by highly respected older scholars such as DuBois and Jessie Fauset, who both served as literary editors of the magazine, emerging young authors such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Countee Cullen saw some of their earliest literary efforts published in this magazine for African American children. Recommended books "For the Children's Library," including titles such as Hazel (the story of a Negro child with her experiences in her Massachusetts home and on her visit to Alabama), by Mary White Overton; History of the Negro, by Benjamin G. Brawley; Complete Poems of Paul Lawrence Dunbar; The Negro, by W.E.B. DuBois; The Negro in Literature and Art, by B. G. Brawley; and The Child's Story of Dunbar, by Julia Henderson" (September, 1920); were included in each issue. The letters, poems, real and fairy stories, and plays written by the children themselves, as well of the writings of adults were also included in each issue, along with announcements of special achievements by children, photographs, games, and current world events ("As the Crow Flies").

The broad humanitarian goals of the magazine which appeared on each cover page of the short-lived publication read as follows:

> The Brownies' Book--A Monthly Magazine for the Children of the Sun. Designed for all children, but especially for ours. It aims to be a thing of Joy and Beauty, dealing in Happiness, Laughter and Emulation, and designed especially for Kiddies from Six to Sixteen. It will seek to teach Universal Love and Brotherhood for all little folk --black and brown and yellow and white.

Philadelphia-born Rhodes Scholar Alain Locke described the rebirth or "renaissance" of literary race consciousness and pride which appeared in the United States following the war, which announced the arrival of the New Negro, in an anthology with this title which he edited in 1925. He described the event in vivid terms:

> ...The mind of the Negro seems suddenly to have slipped from under the tyranny of social intimidation and to be shaking off the psychology

> of intimidation and implied inferiority. By shedding the old chrysalis of the Negro problem we are achieving something like a spiritual emancipation... the vital inner grip of prejudice has been broken. (Locke, 1970: 4)

Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Arna Bontemps, Wallace Thurman, Zora Neale Hurston and Jean Toomer were among the outstanding members of this new Black literati. Their collective writings reflected basic African American existence, which included an African essence or racial spirit which was distinct from white America. While the young writers from this era chose to be different and expressed pride in these differences, they did not, as a group, wish to be separated physically from white America. They simply wanted equality, democracy, and freedom from physical and mental assaults in what had become their native land after their ancestors were forced into slavery and brought here in chains.

A year after graduating from high school in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1920, a young boy named **Langston Hughes** was brought into Harlem's exciting world with the publication of a poem in Crisis, the literary magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Hughes' free-verse poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," along with "I Have a Rendezvous with Life (with apologies to Alan Seeger)," the highly praised poem written by Countee Cullen, another African American youth destined to become a star of the Harlem black cultural scene, have been called "harbingers" of this exciting and productive period in the African American History:

> "Rendezvous" struck New York like a lonesome meteor, burned brightly for a short time, then faded. "Rivers" touched down more like twilight itself. That they were both harbingers is now evident, and it is no surprise that when the literary and cultural awakening won attention three years later, these two poets, though still unpublished in book form, were the new stars that caused the eyes of both black and white intellectuals to blink. (Bontemps, 1972: 3)

Unlike several other young writers of his day, Hughes did not reach the peak of his writing career during these exciting years of the Renaissance, and then quietly fade into literary obscurity. From the first appearance of his poems in Crisis in the early twenties, and throughout the next four decades of his life, he remained constantly in the forefront of African American literary activity. Over the years, Hughes found resources for much of his writing from his extensive travel across the United States, Mexico, the West Coast of Africa, Northern Europe, and various other interesting places throughout the world; but he always had a favorite subject--Harlem and the ordinary black working folk who populated this big city within a city. He captured the spirit of their hard lives, the rhythms of their speech, and the beauty of their souls in the music of his poetry and prose. Never before had maids, porters, and bus boys found themselves reflected in a poet's creations. Never before had a poet dared to reveal the dance halls, night clubs, and cabarets that flowed with black life on any Saturday night in Harlem. He left old traditions behind to experiment and fashion new forms of black expression based on the spirituals, the blues, the ballads, the work and dance songs, and the folk sermon. (Davis, 1974: 65) Although

Hughes' popularity, like his poetry, had its genesis in the hearts and experiences of the African American, his writings also spoke to and for the "common man" of many nations. From the very beginning of his long career, his work was well known and respected by foreign readers:

> Because his plays, poems, and short stories have appeared in a dozen different languages from Arabic to Polish, it is not overstating the case to say that Hughes is accepted by people all over the world as the voice of the American Negro. (Dickinson, 1972: 65)

When the younger writers, who emerged during this era, received criticism from the older and more conservative writers and race leaders for certain aspects of black life the "youth" had chosen to reveal to the reading public, Hughes responded in unequivocal terms for himself and his cohorts:

> We the younger Negro artists now intend to express our individual dark skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain free from within ourselves. (Hughes, 1926: 694)

One of the other young stars of this Renaissance period was **Countee Cullen.** Because his writing style followed the patterns of established European poets, he did not have to worry about the criticism of the older more conservative (and Eurocentric) Black leaders. Countee Cullen's first poem was published in 1918, in the Modern School Magazine, while he was still a student in a New York City public high school. Following his very active and successful high school career, he attended New York University, where he continued to excel academically and published his first book of verse, Color (1925), during his senior year. Unlike his friend Langston Hughes, Cullen gained fame and recognition as a lyric poet, writing in the traditional English style of John Keats and Edna St. Vincent Millay. Two years after this first publication he received the first award in literature from the William Harmon Foundation, and published two additional volumes of verse--Copper Sun (1927b) and The Ballad of the Brown Girl (1927a). By 1929, the year that the depression essentially ended the "New Negro Renaissance," Cullen's poetry had been published in several popular magazines, and had been collected in three additional books. From 1929, until his death in 1946, he taught school in the New York public schools, and wrote two books for children--The Lost Zoo (1940) and My Nine Lives and How Lost Them (1942).

Although it has been suggested that Cullen did not have a racial, social or political agenda (Emanuel and Gross, 1968: 75-76), and merely wanted to be a "good lyric poet," not a "good Negro" poet, his most famous poem--"Heritage," takes its theme from the familiar and common plight of Africans in the diaspora who are living in one world, yet pulled psychologically toward a native land of which they know very little:

What is Africa to me:
Copper sun or scarlet sea,
Jungle star or jungle track,
Strong bronzed men, or regal black
Women from whose loins I sprang
When the birds of Eden sang?
One three centuries removed
From the scenes his father loved,
Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
What is Africa to me?...
(Cullen, 1925: 36)

Several years would pass before large numbers of African American writers and scholars would define Africa as the source of their rich cultural heritage, and the **center** of their historical, psychological, and cultural reality (Asante, 1980), but Cullen's poem would serve as an indicator of the various stages the black literary tradition passed before it could reach this point.

Claude McKay was another bright literary star of the Renaissance era who played a key role in the evolution of the African American literary tradition. McKay was not a United States citizen, and he was not one of the young visionaries of the period who used their talent to urge this country to fulfill its ideals of justice and democracy. He was a Jamaican who had been introduced at an early age to socialist ideology by his older brother before migrating to the United States in 1912, to further his writing career. McKay's unique personal background, including the beginnings of a successful career as a writer in his native land, and his ultimate stardom within the Harlem-centered cultural explosion, where he was claimed and celebrated by African Americans as one of their own, demonstrated the multi-faceted nature of the expanding African literary tradition.

Like most of the young and talented black artists of his day, McKay was drawn to Harlem--the mecca of black culture and the heart of African American urban life--by the exciting events which were happening in this city within a city. For a time he lived in Harlem, sampled the bohemian life of Greenwich Village, and wrote several poems. Like Countee Cullen, Mckay was primarily a lyric poet and cultivated the form validated by centuries of European culture--the Shakespearean sonnet:

> In 1919, his voice smashed through a sound barrier in America, with the appearance of the explosive sonnet, 'If We Must Die'. From a Black poet America had not heard its likes before, although McKay had published poems under a pseudonym in 1917. (Kent, 1970: 38)

McKay had become enraged against the wholesale slaughter of his people throughout the United States during the race riots of 1919. His fiery sonnet, which captured the post-war spirit of defiance characteristic of black America, had come at a time when his people most needed it. Over night the poem made McKay the poet-hero of African Americans, and ironically, a best seller in the white world as well. McKay's popularity in mainstream American culture appeared inevitable after Senator Henry Cabot Lodge read the poem into the Congressional Record as evidence of "Negro radicalism" in the country. Literate white America wanted to understand this "New Negro."

If We Must Die

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
making their mock at our accursed lot.
if we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
in vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!
(McKay, 1953: 36) First published in 1919.

His fiery message, even though it was written in the form of a Shakespearean sonnet, seemed to speak for all African Americans who believed that they had waited far too long for freedom and justice in the land of their birth. The "New Negro" had reached the breaking point, and was now ready to fight back against the nation's oppression. Later that same year McKay left for England and became a journalist for a socialist newspaper. Although his work continued to be widely read in America, he published all of his work which appeared during the Renaissance era from Europe. While his poetic form was most similar to Countee Cullen's traditional European style, McKay's subject matter was very much like Langston Hughes'. McKay was also a people's poet; he chose the common, ordinary folk for his subject matter, and his writing reflected their lifestyles, their hopes, and their dreams. After the early twenties, he turned his attention to prose fiction and wrote three novels: Home to

Harlem (1928), which received the Harmon Gold Award Medal, Banjo (1929), and Banana Bottom (1933).

Zora Neale Hurston was undoubtedly the most outstanding young female writer to add her unique literary voice to the chronicles of the era. She hailed from an all-black town in Eatonville, Florida, and arrived in New York in 1925, with a style and passion uniquely her own to claim Opportunity Magazine's literary awards in the short story and play categories. Inspired by the eminent anthropologist, Franz Boas, she changed her major at Barnard college from literature to anthropology and received a scholarship to do field work in the South. Using the folkloric themes and motifs she had become familiar with during her childhood, and applying the research techniques she learned in the classroom to gather additional experiences in the field, she began a life's journey which earned her a reputation as one of the nation's most highly respected African American folklorist (Hemenway, 1977).

While many of her contemporaries during the Renaissance years seemed to be ashamed to acknowledge the rural, southern traditions typical of black folk life which the white minstrel and literary traditions had taken such pains to caricature and/or vilify, Hurston celebrated these traditions, along with the African American men and women who created them. Through her works, [the majority of her books were published in the years following the Renaissance] she reminded her fellow Americans that African peoples, even those surviving on the lowest rungs of the nation's social and economic ladder, had a voice of their own, a soul, a spirit, a mythology, a history and a humanity that in spite of negation, would not die or be denied. She did this in her own way, by sharing the collective voice of her people through their folklore.

Jean Toomer, Wallace Thurman, Nella Larson, Rudolph Fisher, George Schuyler, Sterling Brown, Arna Bontemps, and many others whose names are not as well remembered as some of the talented men and women whose writing helped to light this exciting era, all contributed during this most significant period in the evolution of the African American literary tradition. Each writer brought his or her own unique set of experiences to their work, yet they also shared many of the same historical and cultural realities from their distant African past, along with the often harsh social, political, and economical realities of their place and time in the history and literary tradition of the United States. Unfortunately, what could and should have been a rich collective ancestry and literary legacy, fostering pride and artistic inspiration in African Americans, had instead been turned into a badge of shame to be ignored and/or forgotten for many decades.

Arna Bontemps was one writer and educator who fully understood the impact of America's tradition of denigrating the history, culture, and character of African peoples, on African American youth. He focused much of his early writings on juvenile literature to counter-act this tradition (Bontemps, 1931, 1932, 1934, 1936, 1937, 1941, 1948, and 1949). Unfortunately, Bontemps did not receive the attention and literary recognition for his diverse and fine artistic efforts that some of his best friends (Cullen, Hughes, and McKay) received during the Harlem Renaissance era (Davis, 1974: 83-84). Apparently, the genre of literature for children, or juvenile literature, was very much like Americans of African ancestry, and would have to struggle for many years before it received the respect and attention it deserved in the national American and Western literary traditions.

In this New World reality (United States), largely built from the labor of enslaved Africans, where Americans of European ancestry possessed the power to create and maintain literary images and a national ethos which denigrated all peoples of color, including their unique contributions to civilization and world culture, these African American writers, like the others who came before them, had to struggle to reclaim their lost heritage. Many of these young writers began this journey backward with the guidance and encouragement of African American scholars and literary trailblazers such as **Alain Locke**, **James Weldon Johnson**, **Charles S. Johnson**, **W. E. B. DuBois**, **Jessie Fauset**, and **Arthur Schomberg**; and with the inspiration of the great Jamaican visionary, **Marcus Garvey**, who shouted, "Up You Mighty Race!" and created a race consciousness and a mass movement to return [both mentally and physically] to Africa.

Unlike Marcus Garvey, most of the leading figures from this era, including the the younger literary voices, did not totally reject the values, creative forms, or even literary traditions of Europe and America. The writers were aware that their work would be judged by white critics and that their books for the most part would be bought by white readers. Some even "modeled themselves after writers adjudged to be best by the American public" (Turner and Stanford, 1971: 9). Most of the major African American participants in this era chose to be included in the American dream and favored integration along with equal opportunity and justice. Because they did not reject all that Western Civilization represented, future generations (Neal, 1966: 7) would question the veracity of the youthful voices from this era which swore a new literary vision. This would have been a mistake, for although the "New Negros" of the Harlem Renaissance, whose collective voices helped to define this era, were not totally revolutionary, they were one step closer to recognizing, reclaiming, and expanding a literary tradition which had roots in ancient Africa, and at the same time was very much a part of the American and Western world realities.

FROM THE DEPRESSION YEARS TO THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA

Although the Renaissance era essentially came to a close with the stock market crash of 1929, the African American literary tradition with new voices emerging to assume leadership continued. **Richard Wright** was born in 1908, on a plantation near Natchez, Mississippi, but grew to fame during the depression years. He spent his youth in Memphis, Tennessee, and learned at an early age what it meant to be poor, hungry, and black in America in the first decades of the 20th century. As a youth Richard had three dreams--to get an education, to become a writer, and to get out of the South. He and his family became one of the thousands of southern black families which migrated to the American North and West after the war, attempting to make a better life for themselves. The Wrights soon found that life was far from easy in the midwestern metropolis of Chicago, but certainly better than in the South.

The full impact of the depression struck Chicago, like the rest of the nation, shortly after the Wright family arrived in the city. While he struggled to survive the horrors of the depression, Wright found one consolation, the public library in Chicago was not segregated and he was able to read as many books as he desired. In a few short years, Richard Wright became the most celebrated African writer in American history. He was the first twentieth century writer to deal extensively with the economic and moral problems of the African American as they existed in the nation's northern ghettos.

In 1933, a friend introduced Wright to Chicago's John Reed Club, one of several literary and artistic clubs organized throughout the nation by a group of Communist intellectuals. Treated as an equal and an intellectual for the first time by the integrated members of the club inspired and stimulated him to begin his writing career. The Communist club brought meaning to Wright's life, and provided an escape from the daily drudgery of living in the Chicago ghetto and working on his boring job as a street cleaner. In a short time he became a vital member and officer of the organization, and worked on the club's magazine which frequently published his work. This was most significant because many magazines were going out of business because of the depression and the national economy. Fabre, Wright's biographer, helped to explain why young Richard was drawn to the Communist organization:

> He came to see in Marxism an organized search for truth about the life of oppressed peoples, and this convinced him that the Communist were sincere ... It was perhaps the first time that Wright had felt needed. (Fabre, 1973: 97)

From the very beginning Wright had conflicts with the Party officials, who wanted all of their members to spend as much time as possible on Party work, while Wright only wanted to concentrate on his writing. They also wanted to dictate exactly what and how their writers would create, and Richard would have none of this. In 1938, Uncle Tom's Children, Wright's collection of stories about black people who are victimized by the brutality and violence of life in the South, was published. The book's success made the young author one of the literary stars of the Party; and at the same time brought him freedom from Party pressures, since the Communists did not wish to alienate him and lose his publicity.

Wright, like many other artists, intellectuals and ordinary African American citizens on the lowest levels of the nation's economy, was also drawn to the political programs for equality of the races espoused by the Communists. Since African Americans were the most discriminated against group in the country and were hit harder than any other Americans by the depression, their racial solidarity, political awareness and participation grew and developed during these hard economic times (Record, 1951). A change in the Communists' American strategy made it possible for the Party to push for a "Negro People's United Front," by blending their actions with those the blacks were initiating themselves. Some of these actions included organizing rent strikes, labor unions, and campaigns for relief. The Party loudly protested the many injustices perpetrated against African Americans, and their lawyers took the cases of blacks who were falsely accused in the American judicial system.

The publication of Native Son on March 1, 1940, made Richard Wright one of the great names among American novelists of the forties. The novel sold 200,000 copies in under three weeks, breaking a 20 year record at Harpers (Record, 1951: 180). Wright's portrait of Bigger Thomas, a young black man so frustrated by his own ignorance, poverty and inability to do anything about it, that he explodes and behaves like the "animal" or "brute" white society had prejudged him to be, became an indictment against the entire American system. It was as if Wright had said, "if you do not destroy the ghettos and the discrimination which creates them, their products will destroy you!" Unlike his first popular collection of stories, Wright wanted this work to lead to constructive change for the masses of his people, not merely to provide an emotional release through the tears of white readers.

Although the novel reflected Wright's affiliation, or at least his consciousness of the ideology of the Communist Party, his most celebrated novel does not suggest that a revolution would be a cure for American ills. His book, as shocking as it was to white America, still followed the African American's long literary tradition of seeking reform. The book also reflected the seeds of "Black Nationalism," and for Wright's call for racial solidarity, the party took him to task.

Historian Wilson Record provided several reasons to explain why Wright ultimately quit, and why so few African Americans joined the Communist Party in these years before the second world war, in spite of the organization's many efforts to recruit them. Some of these reasons included the fear of a "double-stigma," the numerous restrictions that Party doctrine imposed, the fact that the Communist had preached anti-religion for so long, or that they tried to treat African Americans as a completely different culture than other Americans because this group had generally been left out of the country's so-called mainstream. What the Party did not understand was that these "Negroes" were still Americans who believed in Democracy. They screamed so loudly because they wanted their fair share; they did not want revolution; they wanted reform:

> The Communist were to learn the hard way that the Negro working class, like Negro society in general [including the leading literary voices], reflected the values and patterns of the dominant white institutions. (Record, 1951: 33)

In the 1950's, two other African American writers emerged that were hailed as "greats" by the American and European literary world. One was **Ralph Ellison**, a young man who was mentored by Wright, and who became his close friend; and the other was **James Baldwin**, born and raised in the slums of Harlem.

Ellison was born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and grew up in a middle income African American home very different from the one that produced Richard Wright. Ellison attended Tuskeegee Institute in 1933, to study music and become a composer of symphonic music. In the summer of his junior year he left school and moved to New York, planning to follow his other dream of becoming a sculptor. Ellison met Wright shortly after the publication of Uncle Tom's Children and the two men quickly developed a friendship. With Wright's encouragement and guidance, Ellison gave up his plans to become a sculptor and began a career in writing. Like Wright and many other intellectuals of this period, Ellison's early writings ("The Birthmark" (New Masses, 1940), "Recent Negro Fiction" (New Masses, 1941; and "The Way It Is" (New Masses, 1942) reflected his attraction to political radicalism and left-wing politics (Emanual and Gross, 1968: 250). Unlike Wright, Ellison's strong individualism most likely kept him from joining the Communist Party, or any other formal organization.

In 1952, Ellison published Invisible Man, and immediately became a celebrity. The novel received the National Book Award for fiction the following year, and twelve years later (1964) it was named by two hundred writers and critics as the most distinguished single work in the last twenty years. The novel is written in the form of an autobiographical essay, and dramatizes the same themes he had developed earlier in his short fictional works--"the need for white Americans to recognize the Negro's [African American's] identity in all of its complexity" (Emanuel and Gross, 1968: 249).

Although Richard Wright and Ellison came from very different backgrounds and had very different writing styles and techniques, their works have frequently been compared critically:

> generally recognized as the two best novelists yet produced by American Negroes, both men have become a part of the literary mainstream and have done so by making use of the myths and critical techniques of the Western world. And yet both owe much to another tradition--that of the Negro folk. Both also owe a great deal to the dual background that every Negro has. Each had to be two things: Negro and American. (Davis, 1974: 207-8)

While Wright made Western critics aware of the literary capability of African Americans, and set standards which later black writers were forced to match (Turner and Stanford, 1971: 27), Ellison brought his writing to "the summit of the American literary establishment.. Never before had a Negro writer been so accepted by the dominant critical circles, discussed as a major figure of contemporary American literature rather than as a 'race' writer" (Chapman, 1968: 192).

James Baldwin was born in the city (Harlem) which had served as a beacon to so many of his African American artistic predecessors who came seeking the excitement and literary nourishment provided by this "Black Metropolis." Unfortunately, Baldwin grew up very much aware of the ugly side of Harlem life which was often overlooked by outsiders who only saw only the surface of nation's largest urban ghetto. This harsh reality was viewed by Baldwin from his cramped tenement, and was most typified by crime, violence, and poverty (Huggins, 1971).

When he celebrated his fifth birthday (1929), the country had plunged into an economic depression that severely impacted the masses of African Americans who had already been struggling on the lowest rungs of the nation's economic ladder. Baldwin was a bright sensitive youngster who found refuge from his poverty between the pages of the many books he read while helping his mother take care of his eight younger brothers and sisters. The first book he read was Uncle Tom's Cabin, by Harriet Beecher Stowe, followed by numerous other works he borrowed from the library on 135th Street, and devoured as if they were some type of soul food (Eckman, 1966: 16). He saw his first writing in print at the age of 12, when he won a prize for a short story about the Spanish Revolution which was published in a church newspaper. He was editor of his junior high school newspaper and wrote for his school paper when he attended DeWitt Clinton High School. By the time he was 14 years old, Baldwin had followed in the footsteps of his stepfather and become a boy preacher in the Pentecostal Church. For the next three years he preached in store front churches, gaining a reputation for his powerful delivery and great skill in spreading the gospel. This vocation helped him avoid the drugs, alcohol, easy sex, and crime which were ever present antidotes for the harsh realities of life in the Harlem ghetto; and which he feared would destroy his life as it had done so many of his childhood friends.

When Baldwin left the church to further his literary career, his spirituality and Christian ethics went with him. These were reflected in his later writings. His first professional efforts were book reviews, "mostly about the Negro problem," as it was reflected in the nation's urban ghettos. The segregation and discrimination he faced on a regular basis as he attempted to make a living as a laborer weighed heavily on him and helped to shape the angry, but "brilliant," prose he soon became known for using in his reviews which were printed in The Nation, New Leader, Commentary, and other periodicals. With encouragement and support for his writing during these years from Richard Wright, Baldwin received the Eugene F. Saxton Memorial Trust Award to help him complete a novel. Unable to develop his writing and use his talent as he desired in his chosen profession, he followed the path taken by Wright, McKay, and many other African American artists, and left Harlem and the United States, clutching a one-way ticket to Paris. In an interview with African American critic Henry Gates, Baldwin explained his decision to leave his native land: "it was November, 1948, Armistice Day...I left because I was a writer. I had discovered writing and I had a family to save. I had only one weapon to save them, my writing. And I couldn't write in the United States" (Gates, 1985: 597-598).

Although he had vowed to never return to America, Baldwin, in fact, returned again and again to the United States. His first visit occurred four years later when he completed his first novel, Go Tell It on the Mountain (1953), and he came home to find a publisher. With the publication of his first collection of essays, Notes of a Native Son (1955), two years later, Baldwin had become recognized as one of America's most promising writers. Over the next several years with high periods and low periods, through his essays, novels, plays, and articles for magazines, journals, and newspapers, he continued to make a living from his writing and grew to be a major American literary voice. All the while he seemed to be serving "as a kind of measuring rod for the nation's social conscious...and a public witness to the situation of black people and the racial sickness which America has" (Davis, 1974: 216). His voice, from the beginning to the end of his career, remained as angry, as accusing and as unrelenting as it was stylistically rich and rhetorically profound. He received the highest possible praise for his mastery of the English language and for his powerful rhetorical style. Baldwin's use of the white man's idiom has been described in various reviews over the years in terms such as "forceful, clear, direct, accusatory, eloquent in its passion, logical, filled with fierce pride and dogged hope, clean, honest, powerful, and angry." Philadelphia editorialist, Claude Lewis, an old friend of Baldwin's, described him as follows in a tribute written shortly after his death in 1987: "...he was an unusually gifted and authentic writer and thinker, a permanent performer that America had produced despite its poisonous attitude toward blacks. **He was,** as it turned out, **a joke on racism"** (Lewis, 1987: A6).

Long and Collier recognized Baldwin as a "brilliant essayist and inspired writer of fiction and drama," (p. 619) but they also identified him as an important part of American literature because he articulated the experiences of the urban black American from the Wright-Ellison generation of the 40's and 50's, to the revolutionary 1960's (Long and Collier, 1972). Baldwin's success as an American essayist and novelist demonstrated how far the African American writer had advanced since the post-Reconstruction era when the only acceptable image of black men and women were the ones provided by white southern apologists for the nation's "peculiar institution of slavery" (Stampp, 1956).

At the same time he received accolades and respect for his literary gifts, Baldwin was increasingly frustrated by his inability to induce America to change its unjust laws and racist practices which kept African Americans on the lowest rungs of American society. Like most of his predecessors, he struggled to reach the white power brokers with the basic morality and justice behind his message. He worked very closely with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, but as the violence against peaceful demonstrators increased and the advocates of Black Power initiated a black social, political, and cultural revolution, grounded in Black Nationalism, Baldwin was criticized by leaders of the Black Arts Movement for being part of the "Negro Establishment," and for fighting for integration into the mainstream:

> Baldwin's problem was that he was the conscience of a movement (civil rights) which has as its goal integration into a dying system, instead of the destruction of the white idea of the world. In The Fire Next Time, he begins to understand certain very basic things about black people in this society, the most important of which is that the only thing whites have that black people should want is power. (Neal, 1966: 60-61)

Although the major figures identified in most critical texts and literature publications as shapers and carriers of the African American literary tradition during the years between the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Power/Black Arts Movement were male, this does not mean that African American females made no significant contributions to this literary evolution. Women such as

Margaret Walker, Gwendolyn Brooks, Ann Petry, Paule Marshall, Dorothy West and **Loraine Hansberry** each made rich and important contributions to the overall American and African American literary canons which should not be undervalued or overlooked. Mary Helen Washington has reminded literary scholars and others that the word "tradition," when applied to literature, has historically been used to exclude or misrepresent women. To help clarify why the literary contributions of African American women were not given the same recognition as those of their male counterparts, Washington explains as follows:

> what we have to recognize is that the creation of the fiction of tradition is a matter of power, not justice, and that power has always been in the hands of men--mostly white but some black. Women are the disinherited. Our 'ritual journeys,' our 'articulate voices,' our 'symbolic spaces,' are rarely the same as men's. Those differences and the assumption that those differences make women inherently inferior plus the appropriation by men of the power to define the tradition account for women's absence from our written records. (Washington, 1987: xvii)

Not only did African American women make major literary contributions during the eras of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, but the social and cultural awakening which occurred throughout the nation as a result of these black led mass movements also led to an improved climate of acceptance and recognition for writings of black women (and other women) during the 1970's and 80's which had never been witnessed before in the Western world. Ironically, the same can be said for children's literature, and the authors who chose this genre as their primary area of concentration. The evolution of this sub-division of the African American literary tradition [Afrocentric literature for children] will be the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

AN OLD TRADITION, A NEW CHALLENGE: AFROCENTRIC LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN

> The risk for our children in school is not a risk associated with their intelligence. Our failures have nothing to do with IQ, nothing to do with poverty, nothing to do with race, nothing to do with language, nothing to do with style, nothing to do with the need to discover new pedagogy, nothing to do with the development of unique and differentiated special pedagogies, nothing to do with the children's families... the fundamental problem facing us today... and only one problem: **Do we truly will to see each and every child in this nation develop to the peak of his or her capacities?**
> (Hilliard, 1991: 36)

IN THE BEGINNING

Although unrecognized in the Western world, literary art of high quality, whether in written or spoken form, has existed on the continent of Africa for thousands of years. Beginning in Ancient Egypt, where writing first developed, and where literature for instruction or teaching was one of the earliest delineated classifications[1], this tradition has continued in various forms throughout the continent. In spite of this ancient appreciation for written expression, grounded in a respect for learning and the belief in the "teachability of humans" in the interest of moral wisdom (Karenga, 1990: 29); the spoken word has remained paramount in African culture for equally as many millennia.

With an even higher respect for the language art form which relied on memory for its execution and perpetuation--oral expression, including languages rich in proverbs, folktales, fables, and imaginative storytelling-- as well as those who mastered this gift, have been very important features of African communal life:

> Storytellers have always been crucial to the life of the community in Africa. They did not simply entertain; they served as the chroniclers of tradition, the custodians of history, the guardians of their society's values and beliefs. Stories were used to educate children about their people's customs and they are still used today to supplement Western-style education. (Fox, 1992: 84)

When Africans were captured and forced into slavery in the "New Worlds" across the Atlantic, their respect for and use of oral expression went with them, and reemerged in transformed folkways and cultural traditions developed in their new homelands. Denied the opportunity to formally learn to read and write the language of their enslavers, the majority of Africans in the diaspora learned these foreign languages as best they could, and soon used them in the art of storytelling and dramatic speech much as it had been used in Africa. In fact, many of the same myths, legends, characters and themes appeared in the oral creations which were heard in the slave compound. (Brewer, 1968)

The children of the slave communities, like their younger African ancestors, were highly valued and loved by their blood and non-blood families. Although they were denied a formal education, they received informal educations about all aspects of African

American culture through the long-remembered and passed down tales of the elders of their communities. The youth listened to these stories and learned about the former glories of African ancestors, the lore and folkways of their people, and the many victories, large and small, achieved by men and women of their race in spite of countless indignities and cruelty common in this country's "peculiar institution slavery." By using their imaginations, wit and humor to outsmart their captors, Africans in the Americas were able to inspire a new generation to keep on keeping on, and to survive enslavement and make a better day. Understanding the importance slave holders placed on keeping reading and writing skills away from their captives, the poor, and the landless whites, countless enslaved Africans risked severe punishment, and sometimes death, to obtain these forbidden skills; and whenever possible, to pass them on to a child, a brother, a sister, parent or friend.

When the formal institution of slavery finally ended in the United States (1865), after nearly two hundred and fifty years and a brutal civil war which almost tore the nation apart, learning to read and write became two of the most important goals for African American freedmen, women, and children. Schools built by the Freedmen's Bureau were packed with children and senior citizens alike, all wanting to receive the education which had been denied them for so many years. Historian Lerone Bennett explained in the quote which follows how important an education and reading and writing were to the former enslaved African Americans following the Civil War:

> With a yearning born of centuries of denial, ex-slaves worshipped the sight and sound of the printed word. Old men and women on the edge of the grave could be seen in the dark of the night, pouring over the Scripture by the light of a pine knot, painfully spelling out the sacred words. (Bennett, Jr., 1966: 181)

During the few short years of Reconstruction governments, which witnessed African American men serving for the first time as elected and appointed government officials, laws were passed to institute public education so all children, not just the sons and daughters of rich white land owners, would have a chance to go to school and obtain an education. A controversy within and outside the African American community quickly developed over the kind of education which would be best for the children of America's newest citizens. "There was the feeling on the part of most persons that the success or failure of the Negro in adjusting himself depended on the type of education to which he was exposed" (Franklin, 1967: 389). With the fall of Reconstruction governments and the loss of most political power and other opportunities for advancement gained following the war, the belief in the necessity for a "good education" for their youth continued to be a primary concern of African Americans. This concern motivated countless families to join in a great migration out of the South to find better conditions for educating their children. It quickly became apparent during the post-Reconstruction years, which Rayford Logan (1970) referred to as "the Nadir," or low point in African American history, that without political, economic, and social power, their chance of obtaining a quality education for their children was very slim.

EARLY LEADERSHIP EMERGES

In 1906, when **W.E.B. DuBois** and fifty-nine other colored men from seventeen different states joined forces to form the "Niagara Movement," to plan an organized, aggressive and determined effort to obtain freedom and justice for African Americans, quality education for their children was one of their primary demands:

> We want our children educated...and when we call for education, we mean real education...Education is the development of power and ideal. We want our children trained as intelligent human beings should be, and we will fight for all time against any proposal to educate black boys and girls simply as servants and underlings, or simply for the use of other people. They have a right to know, to think, to aspire. (DuBois, 1968: 91-92) [my emphasis]

This was the first organized attempt by DuBois and other leading African Americans to raise collective protest against the great reaction after the Reconstruction, but it would soon be followed by many others. Violence against African American citizens raged throughout the country, reaching such grave magnitudes that it shocked the sensibilities of many whites and led several prominent white men and women to call a National conference "for believers of democracy, to discuss the present evils, the voicing of protest, and the renewal of the struggle of civil and political liberty" (Franklin, 1967: 446). Most of the members of the Niagra Movement who were willing to work for black rights within a white structure accepted an invitation to attend the conference. A permanent organization which came to be known as the **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People** was created as a result of this conference. In 1910, W.E.B. DuBois became the director of publicity and research for the newly incorporated organization which had pledged "to work for the abolition of all forced segregation, equal education for Negro and white children, the complete enfranchisement of the Negro, and the enforcement of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments" (Franklin, 1967: 447). DuBois' primary task was to organize the Crisis, the young organization's official magazine, which would become a forum to help carry out the "radical" new programs and plans initiated by the determined membership. Through this forum DuBois was not only able to present a constant voice opposing the iniquities and injustices perpetrated against African Americans, but he was able to motivate and encourage the development of future writers who would add their literary talents to the necessary struggles for the survival of the race.

The organization's struggles against the increasing national violence and the elimination of hard-won black political rights were too paramount an effort for the membership to immediately address the additional need of creating literature for African American children which would counter the lies, stereotypes, and racial character assassinations typically published in the mainstream press[4]. DuBois was able to initiate such an effort ten years after the N.A.A.C.P. and the Crisis were established with the creation of The Brownies' Book, "A Monthly Magazine for Children of the Sun."

At this time, 1920, the most prominent mainstream magazine was St Nicholas, which published verses such as "Ten little niggers went out to dine, one choked his little self, and then there were nine" (Johnson, 1990). Through the pages of The Brownies' Book, DuBois and **Jessie Fauset**, who also served as literary editor and business manager of the magazine, hoped to provide an alternative which would not only avoid the stereotypes, but would celebrate, motivate and encourage African American youth. Unfortunately, the cost of the publication, one dollar and a half a year or fifteen cents a copy, was too much for the average African American family who had to use every penny of their meager wages to feed and clothe their family. In spite of the high praise the publication received, especially from educators and children who had an opportunity to read issues during this first year of publication, the magazine could not pay for itself and cover the printing and distribution costs.

It is quite possible that letters to the editor from children in "The Jury" section of the publication and adults in "The Grown-Ups' Corner," [such as those below] inspired young writers such as **Langston Hughes**, **Arna Bontemps**, and **Countee Cullen**, who began their literary careers with contributions to this short-lived children's publication, to continue writing in later years for the benefit this younger African American population. These letters spoke in clear and revealing terms to express the concerns and opinions of the general African American public about a magazine written specifically for African American youth. The first issue received the following warm response from a reader:

> to say that The Brownies' Book delights us, is expressing our feelings mildly. We have long desired such a periodical, but hardly dared hope that those so much occupied with the weighty problems of today, could find time to think of the children's pleasure. Therefore, to Dr. DuBois and those associated with him in the work, we feel deeply grateful as for a personal favor.
>
> Olive C. Jones, Washington, D.C.

Teachers, school librarians, and family members who worked closely with African American children and knew what literature had previously been in existence for their children, also expressed opinions to the editors of the publication:

> The Brownies' Book is an answer to the call of our children at our library. For three years the children patrons of the library were looking for Negro stories. We were constantly searching for such in our story-hour.
>
> Marion M. Hadley, Nashville, Tenn.

> I can find no words to express my gratitude to you, for bringing out The Brownies' Book. It fills a long felt need for our boys and girls. It would have pleased you to see my little girl with her first copy, and I am sure it would have taxed even your fertile mind to have answered all her questions. You will, I am sure, meet with much deserved success, and the boys and girls throughout America will thank you for introducing a magazine that tells them something of what their own race is doing.
>
> Andrew J. Branic, New York City

> My little sister Katie got her first copy of The Brownies' Book the other day. She is so proud of it, because it is her very own. She goes about hugging it in her arms and

> we have the hardest time to persuade her to let us see it. She can't get over the little Queen of Abyssinia. She hears lots of fairy tales and knows all about princes and queens, and so on. She says, "that little girl don't look very old; maybe when I'm as big as her, I'll be a queen too." We are all interested in the magazine. I am fifteen and I like it as much as Katie.
>
> Ruth Halliwell, Boston, Mass.

Some of the children who read the first issues of The Brownies' Book voiced their own opinions about the void this publication would undoubtedly fill in the lives of African American youth. They even wrote to ask for recommendations of other literature that they could read which would continue to nourish their spirit and inspire them to reach for the stars:

> Could you take time to to suggest a small library for me? Or if you couldn't do you know anybody who could? I want to know a great deal about colored people. I think when I finish high school I shall go to Africa, and work there in some way. If I decide to do this I ought to know a great deal about our people and all the places where they live, all over the world, don't you think so? My father is always saying that a great many wonderful things are going to happen to Negroes within the next twenty-five years, and I want to be able to understand and appreciate them.
>
> George Max Simpson, Toronto, Canada

> I get so tired of hearing only of white heroes and celebrating holidays in their honor. I think every year we ought to have parades or some sort of big time on Douglass' birthday and on the anniversary of Crispus

> Attucks' death. I wish you'd say something about this in The Brownies' Book. All the colored girls in my class said they wished so too when I told them I was going to write you.
> Claudia Moore, Pittsburgh, PA"
> (March 1920, pp. 83 and 109).

After the magazine ceased publication in 1921, very few books were produced with the needs of America's children of color in mind. Through out the the next two decades the status of mainstream publishing and literature about or for black youth could be described as racially offensive. Langston Hughes and his friend Arna Bontemps were two of the writers from the Renaissance era who were able to get their works published during the depression years. They co-authored a novel for juvenile readers in 1932, Popo and Fifina: Children of Haiti; and Hughes published a book of poetry for children, The Dream Keeper, that same year.

Carter G. Woodson, who founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1915, the Journal of Negro History in 1916, the Associated Publishers in 1920, and initiated the observance of Negro History Week in 1926, for the purpose of dramatizing the achievements of the race, and arousing blacks and supportive whites throughout the country to demonstrate what African Americans have actually achieved in spite of serious handicaps; contributed many efforts in his mission to improve the education of African American children and adults. In 1933, Woodson wrote the landmark book, The Mis-education of the Negro, promoted more than half a century later by leading Afrocentric scholars of the 1990's as a major book in the evolution of

Afrocentric theory and American education. Molefi Asante discussed in one of his recent publications (1991) Woodson's interpretation of the damage caused by the African American's miseducation:

> as Woodson contends, African Americans have been educated away from their own culture and traditions and attached to the fringes of European culture; thus dislocated from themselves... Woodson's alert recognition, more than 50 years ago, that something is severely wrong with the way African Americans are educated provides the principal impetus for the Afrocentric approach to American Education. (Asante, 1991b: 170)

Five years after he offered Miseducation as an incentive to obtain necessary changes in the way African American children were educated in this country, Woodson published his own books for children which he felt could be used to support the proper education he advocated--African Heros and Heroines, in 1938, followed by African Myths and Negro Makers of History, in 1948. These books were added to the small list of Afrocentric books which were available to librarians, teachers, and parents who wished to provide African American children with positive images of themselves in the books they were given to read.

During the forties, African American Author Jesse Jackson emerged as a leading author of juvenile books written from the perspective (or center) of black children and families. His first book for young adults, Call Me Charley, was published in 1945, and was offered as "a small tribute to the good people who somehow or other succeed in making bad times better" (Rollock, 1988: 73). This first novel, which was followed by another, Anchor Man, two years later, differed from most mainstream publications because Jackson's book presented a view of the American dream from an African American context, which was not paternalistic and which did not ignore the existence of institutionalized racism in the country. His books, of course, were also the exception because they did not stress "integration as the answer to all of the African American's problems, as long as he worked hard, had faith, and achieved his/her goal of being the first Negro student at a particular school or comparable situation" (Johnson, 1990: 19)

More that thirty years after The Brownies' Book ceased publication, a book review of Famous American Negroes, published in 1954, by Dodd, Mead and Company and authored by Langston Hughes, appeared in the Journal of Negro History History. Hughes, had also written The First Book of Negroes two years earlier. This was a similar volume which included a varied assortment of vivid life stories of African Americans which spaned two hundred years of American History from Phyllis Wheatley to Jackie Robinson, was highly praised for his personal dedication to the education of youth. This new publication was described in the review as Hughes' fifth piece of creative work that was "addressed to American citizens of tomorrow... obviously the book points up Mr. Hughes' versatility as a man of letters, his ability to keep on keeping on, and his ever-expanding concern for the education of the youth population of our time" (Parker, 1954: 152).

One of the "famous Negroes" included in Hughes' book was the African American poetess **Gwendolyn Brooks**, who had received several awards for her poetry, including the Pulitzer Prize in 1950, for her second book of verse, Annie Allen. She was the first African American to receive this honor, which brought full recognition and respect from the entire Western literary world. Like the African American male writers Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin, Brooks had demonstrated once again to those who continued to question the African American's ability to master traditional European literary forms, that not only could this be done, but it could be done through varying reflections of African American life and culture, including views from black urban ghettos.

Gwendolyn Brooks is recognized in her home city of Chicago, Illinois, and throughout the literary world, for her personal dedication and efforts over the past decades "to encourage young black people to find literary expression" (Long and Collier, 1972: 575). One of her earliest efforts to accomplish this personal goal was evident when she published a collection of poems for children, Bronzeville Boys and Girls, in 1956, just three years after receiving the Pulitzer Prize. This publication demonstrated Ms. Brooks' desire to share her her talent and her honor with the children in her local community and in black communities through out the country where they lived.

Ann Petry was another African American female whose literary voice gained a national audience in the 40's when her first novel, The Street (1941), won the Houghton Mifflin Literary Award. This novel followed in the tradition of Richard Wright's style of naturalistic protest literature, but the narrative voice was that of the African American female instead of the male. Petry, who was born in Old Saybrook, Connecticut in a middle income African

American family which had worked in this small New England town as pharmacists for several generations, had not written this first novel from personal experience. She probably had gained her deep understanding of this side of black life after leaving Connecticut and her own career as a pharmacist to work in New York as a journalist.

In 1944, she had left her journalism career to join the the New York Foundation to work on a sociological study of the effect of segregation on ghetto children. Undoubtedly, this experience not only provided incites for realistically developing the plot, theme and characterization of _The Street_, but it also made her aware of the great need for Afrocentric books for the entertainment, motivation, and enrichment of African American children. In 1949, after publishing another adult novel, _The Country Place_ (1947), she wrote _The Drugstore Cat_, a book for young children; and in later years, two works for young adults, _Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad_ (1955) and _Tituba of Salem Village_ (1963); and a juvenile fiction, _Legends of the Saints_, in 1970.

In spite of these outstanding individual efforts by African American men and women who defied the odds to become accomplished writers in this country, and to produce Afrocentric literature for children and young adults; the fact remains that the political and social conditions in this country, including its segregation, discrimination, and institutional racism, made their collective efforts almost insignificant in addressing the dearth of Afrocentric literature available to support the educational growth and development of African American children.

FOOT SOLDIERS IN THE STRUGGLE

Augusta Baker, former Coordinator of Children's Services for the New York Public Library, shared an open letter to juvenile editors in the spring of 1969, in which she provided guidelines for black books, and reflected on the changes which had taken place over the previous three decades. She explained that the current (1969) interest and upsurge in books about black life was merely a repeat of a similar phenomenon which had first occurred in 1937 and 1938. [Carter G. Woodson had published The Mis-education of the Negro in 1933, and Associated Publishers had inaugurated the Negro History Bulletin in October 1937 to supplement literature available in public schools.] She and her colleagues, countless ordinary men and women who worked in segregated schools and libraries throughout the nation, who worked with children in those days and recognized the need for this kind of material was great. Neither black nor white children knew the African American men and women who had made important contributions to the national life and culture, but there were so few books available in the late thirties and and early forties that a model collection could not be gathered unless "quality" was omitted as a guideline and selection criteria (Baker, 1969).

In 1969, Baker contended, the number of books available had increased to the point that "quality" could finally be added as a selection criteria for children's librarians and school teachers, along with the same guidelines which had been recommended in past years when very few books had been available. She described some of these guidelines which persisted throughout the years as follows:

> 1) character illustrations should be natural and attractive, not brown or black-washed faces of white children;
> 2) there should be consistency in speech patterns, without dialect by black characters so strong that they could not be read, while white children were depicted speaking as if they had "Phd's from Oxford";
> 3) the hero of a story should never use derogatory terms such as "pick-a-ninny", "darkie" and "nigger";
> 4) themes and attitudes should reflect a full picture of black life, with characters who are just people and circumstances normal circumstances (i.e., no contrived integration);
> 5) realistic fiction [unheard of in past years] should be written by authors who know their subject from the inside, rather than outside looking in;
> 6) subtle racist attitudes and stereotypical illustrations must not be overlooked in books published abroad, especially in books about Africa; and
> 7) books supposedly written for children should be on the level of the group it is targeted--for children, not about them. (Baker, 1973: 110-114).

Before the status of books for African American children would change in any significant way, hundreds of thousands of African Americans and other concerned citizens who believed in justice and fair play for all American citizens would have to unite to forge a massive civil rights movement. This movement would eventually be heard and seen throughout the world, and gradually would begin to reshape the country into an image more reflective of its founding principles. W. E. B. DuBois demonstrated his full understanding of the social and political dynamics at work in the nation in 1940, when he published his autobiography, Dusk of Dawn, and included the following observation about the evolution of the African American literary tradition: "No authentic literature can rise save at the demand and with the support of the group which is calling or self expression" (DuBois,1968: 270).

EDUCATION AGENDA OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The African American's struggle for civil rights and justice in North America has a history longer than the existence of the nation which became known as the United States of America. The fact that the majority of Africans in the New World prior to the Civil War were held in bondage made abolition the number one priority of the leaders and masses of African Americans. Following the the war and the passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution, which ended slavery and defined the benefits and responsibilities of citizenship, the main agenda of Africans in the United States became the attainment of equal rights--political, social, economic and civil. This agenda gained its greatest momentum after the N.A.A.C.P. was formed and the organization's lawyers waged constant battles in the American judicial system to overturn unfair laws and customs initiated before the Civil War or following the collapse of Reconstruction governments and programs. One of the most significant accomplishments by the N.A.A.C.P., and considered by Afrocentric scholar, Maulana Karenga (1989) to be the "turning point in the Black civil rights struggle," (p. 127) was the winning of the 1954 Supreme Court decision, Brown v. Board of Education. This was the decision which legally ended the "separate but equal" doctrine established in the 1896 Supreme Court decision of Plessy v. Ferguson.

Historian Meyer Weinberg, in assessing the African American's historical quest for education change in this country, posited that "since 1940, the single most important factor in the lives of African-Americans has been the rise of the Civil Rights Movement--in the main, a movement of black people led by black people" (Weinberg, 1991: 3). By the 1960's, this movement, formally initiated when an African American seamstress, Mrs. Rosa Park, decided in 1954 to challenge the Montgomery, Alabama law and the southern custom which required black passengers to stand on public buses if whites did not have a seat, had become the primary vehicle for educational change in the United States. Marching, protests, boycotts, sit-ins, voter registration campaigns, pray-ins, political party building, freedom rides and other forms of direct confrontations for change lasted for more than a decade.

FROM CIVIL RIGHTS TO BLACK POWER

Like the Harlem Renaissance which had occurred some thirty years earlier, the Civil Rights Movement of the nineteen fifties and early sixties was basically an integrationist thrust to end segregation, and to gain parity and fair play for Americans of African ancestry (Karenga, 1989). As passive resistance acts spread across the South, the South responded with their traditional weapons--violence, mass arrests, and expulsions; but the movement, once it had begun, would not end until it had evolved into a revolution--a black cultural revolution which demonstrated that many African Americans had turned their backs on the idea of integration and the so-called "American Dream." This dream was in fact an "American nightmare" for African Americans who had dared to ask for change, and a violent nightmare which forced young African American college students such as Stokely Carmichael and the members of the **Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)** to embrace Black Power, Black Nationalism, Black self-determination and an agenda for survival:

> The painful process of reassessment which occurred in the middle 60's produced, perhaps, the most definitive aspect and achievement of the Sixties - the self-conscious decision of Africans in the U.S. to initiate a theoretical and practical thrust to redefine and restructure society in Black images and interests. (Karenga, 1989: 131)

In 1966, the same year that Stokely Carmichael was elected head of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and announced the organization's new policy and commitment to seek Black Power, several other landmark events occurred which greatly impacted the African American community, including its evolving literary tradition. Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale founded the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California, and Edward Brooke become the first African American elected to the Senate since Reconstruction. Maulana Karenga also founded the US organization [Karenga cites 1965 as the founding year for US in Introduction to Black Studies

(1989)], based on the principles of **Kawaida**, a theory of cultural and social change which its founder believed "would break the monopoly the oppressor had on Black minds and begin to rescue and reconstruct Black history and humanity in their own image and interest" (Karenga, 1989: 133).

One of the changes which had been demanded by the civil rights activists was the "eradication of institutional and personal racism from curriculum, instructional materials, student learning, employment and promotion practices, distribution of school funds, and other areas of schooling" (Weinberg, 1991: 3). In spite of the mass demonstrations and legal triumphs such as Brown v. Board of Education, which brought hope and excitement to so many of the foot-soldiers in the struggle for civil rights, subtle and blatant evasion of the new laws remained the norm. More and more African Americans, especially the African American youth in colleges and public schools throughout the nation, turned away from integrationist leaders [including Dr. Martin Luther King] and listened to Malcolm X, Ron Karenga, Stokely Charmichael, Charles Hamilton, Albert Cleage [minister of the shrine of the Black Madonna], Larry Neal, Amiri Baraka, Haki Madhubuti, and who were espousing various forms of Black Nationalism and Black empowerment. They, in essence, had decided "to cease cooperating in their own oppression" (Willie, 1991: 177).

After the assassination of Dr. Martin L. King, Jr., which was seen as the ultimate form of rejection of the best offer for integrated social change that African Americans could make, many African Americans decided to change their agenda and concentrate on obtaining empowerment from the **inside out**. Whether or not a nationalist position was accepted, African Americans came to the realization that not only was their survival as a people at stake, but they would ultimately have to save themselves. Black strength was found through unity in all possible arenas--cultural, political, educational, economic, and social. Black writers were one of many groups which organized to formulate a united front to move the agenda for black empowerment and survival in America.

SPREAD OF AFROCENTRIC CONSCIOUSNESS

On November 8 - 10, 1974 , **The First National Conference of Afro-American Writers** was sponsored by Howard University's Institute for the Arts and Humanities. The theme of the conference, which attracted close to 3000 persons to the Washington, DC urban campus, was "The Image of Black Folk in American Literature." In April, 1976, a preliminary publication containing the conference presentations from the Non-Fiction, Literature for Young Readers, and Playwriting Panels were presented to conference attenders and to the general public in an attempt to give wider exposure to the discussions which took place during this landmark gathering.

In the conference Welcome Address, **John Oliver Killens**, Writer-in-Residence and Director of the Institute for the Arts and Humanities, explained the purpose of the conference:

> Fellow writers, let us come together in the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood. Let us make this profound attempt to achieve the broadest **unity** possible in an earnest commitment to change, yes, and to revolutionize the

> image that black people have of themselves, how we look at ourselves through our own dark eyes, believing, as I do, with all my mind and soul that all black people want to be free... Some of us just have different and peculiar ways of going about the **struggle** for **survival** and **liberation.** (Killens, 1976: 1)

Killens then went on to explain in his opening address that the time had come to move the agenda beyond the rap and rhetoric of the 1960's. Clearly separating the gathering from the white Euro-American aesthetic tradition, he reminded them of their predecessor, W.E.B. DuBois, who had taught them by word and deed that African American writers needed to use words as "weapons for liberation," because "all art is propaganda; and all art is politics" (p. 2). Before completing his address he reminded the gathering of writers of the hatchet-job which had been done over the decades by the mass media of this country to destroy the African American's image of him and herself; and the fact that so many black folk had believed the "little white lies" which had defined a proud African people as "unworthy niggers." The challenge to the black writer, he contended, was "to create a new reality, a new vision for human beings to strive towards...committing our art to the noblest endeavor on this earth, i.e., the liberation of **humankind**" (p.7).

"The Literature for Young Readers Panel" was comprised of five African American authors who had become recognized as some of the country's most highly honored and respected authors of literature for children and young adults--**Sharon Bell Mathis**, Chairwoman, **Lucille Clifton**, **Lorenze Graham**, **June Jordan**, and **John Steptoe**. Their individual and collective presentations provided a clear picture of the past decades which witnessed neglect and distortion of the image of the black child, his/her history and culture; and the more recent decades, encompassing the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power/Black Arts Movement which had brought a new awareness, personal commitments to struggle, and a clear Afrocentric consciousness.

Sharon Bell Mathis, who chaired the Literature for Young Readers Panel, was a special education teacher, a trained librarian, and a prize winning author of three books, Sidewalk Story (1971), the winning manuscript in the Council of Interracial Books for Children writers' contest in 1970; Ray Charles (1974), which won the Coretta Scott King Award; and The Hundred Penny Box (1975), a Newbery Honor Book which became the basis for a film. In 1982, her Teacup Full of Roses would win the American Library Association Notable Book Award. Mathis brought and shared her multiple skills and personal insights with the various writers, students, educators, and interested lay persons who attended the conference. In the early years of that decade (1970), she had been designated Writer-in-Charge of the children's literature division. Her expertise and commitment to the development of literature for black youth was quite evident in her panel presentation, "Black Writers and Children: Lessons in Black Love," which she began by providing a definition and direction for the growing body of literature by black writers written specifically for those she described as "the younger versions of ourselves":

> a literature which gently nourishes the child's spirit, which praises and celebrates his world through the careful reconstruction of life based on an understanding of his special--sometimes awesome--problems... the ultimate aim of such a literature is to create **a love-directed survival/entertainment kit**. Thus the writer teaches. (Mathis, 1976: 1)

The concept of "arming for **survival**," which had been reiterated in varying ways throughout the past centuries by African American leaders, but most persistently in the years following the Black Power Movement, was reinforced once again in Mathis' definition. Mathis also included the connection between literature and instruction by stressing the role of the writer as a teacher. Unlike the definitions provided in past years by W.E.B. DuBois, and even by Killens in this conference's "Welcome Address," there was no mention in her definition of literature as propaganda or politics. Nothing but the needs and interests of black children were included as relevant factors in this "love-directed" definition. In this respect, the literature described by Mathis was **Afrocentric**, both in content and intent.

In addition to Mathis' commitment and love for black children, her presentation also reflected her love for her fellow "brothers and sisters" who had joined in her personal literary battle to save young black minds and souls. She celebrated these peers and praised their writing as special gifts to the "younger versions of ourselves." She then demonstrated her skills as a teacher and extracted quotes from various Afrocentric books for young readers to use as concrete examples of her "lessons in black love." She used M. C. Higgins, the Great, the award winning book by her "sister" **Virginia Hamilton** to demonstrate her first lesson--**"We can not teach what we do not know--so, it stands as truth that the writer who attempts to reach the child must also love the child"** (1976: 1). This book, she explained, had won the Newbery Medal for Hamilton that year (1974), an honor which is presented annually for the most distinguished book for children in America. Although the American Library Association, which had instituted the award more than fifty years earlier, had never seen fit to present this "prestigious mainstream award" (p. 2) to an African American author, Mathis merely mentioned this fact before moving on to her main goal of praising the author and her creation of "black love," [See Appendix B for listing of books by authors of African ancestry who have received the Coretta Scott King Award presented annually by the American Library Association's Committee for Social Responsibility.] In this sense, Mathis' message was less like some of the Black Nationalists advocates of her time who believed that one of the major criteria for judging black art was its functional capability to "support the revolution, praise the people, and expose the enemy" (Karenga, 1971: 33); and more in accord with the tenets of the later proponents of Afrocentric theory [i.e., Asante, 1990] who believe that aesthetic axiological issues grounded in historical truths and "right conduct" (p. 11) should determine that which is good, of value, and beautiful.

Mathis did not describe M. C. Higgins, the Great as a "magnificent" book simply because the work does not negate black children's positive self-image, but because the book shows that the author both understands and loves black children. In this book, Mathis posited, Hamilton used her words and her imagination to celebrate their children. The book could certainly be functional, but not in the revolutionary sense of combating an "enemy," but in arming a black child to stand tall in the face of all enemies who would negate his or her inherent strengths and capabilities.

Mathis also shared excerpts from **Toni Cade Bambara**'s story "Raymond's Run," included in Tales and Stories for Black Folks , and Lucille Clifton's All Us Come Cross the Water, a book for young children, to demonstrate her second lessons in black love--**"it is an absolute fact that Black children have an intellectual strength as well as spiritual and physical strengths. If we love them we'll tell them this--and remind them of it"** (1976: 5).

To reinforce the historical importance of education in the lives of African American people, and the many sacrifices and struggles which were made by black children and adults to attain an education in spite of the many road blocks placed in their way, Mathis shared an excerpt from Nat Turner, **Judith Berry Griffin**'s biography for young readers. In addition, **Eloise Greenfield**'s book Sister was discussed as an example of a book which recognizes the necessity of an alternative education for black children which consciously combats the "mis-education" found in traditional American classrooms. The many independent, cooperative, or freedom schools which had been opened throughout the African American community in the sixties and early 70's were applauded for the void they were filling in young black lives. Mathis commended Greenfield for writing out of the "total belief in the necessity for more fully educated Black children" (p. 7). The kind of education which must be provided for black children was outlined in her third lesson in black love--"**no matter what his situation, a child has within his own power, the ability to change and grow--to develop--and to live a worth-while life not only for himself but for others as well**" (1976: 8-9).

Fellow panelist **June Jordan**, and her book His Own Where. was also applauded by Mathis. The book was described as "eloquent... a truly original--wholly creative masterpiece, which had a great deal to say about children who shape their lives for others" (p. 9). Commitment to others, particularly to the family and to the greater black community rather than to self and the individual, is an Afrocentric paradigm, or "organizing model," which may be found in the oral and written literature in traditional and contemporary African culture, in the theories and literature of leading Black Nationalists [i.e., Neal, Karenga, Baraka, Hoyte Fyller, etc.] of the Civil Rights/Black Power era, and also in current (1990's) Afrocentric literature and theory (i.e., Asante, 1990).

In addition to June Jordan, several other authors who Mathis referred to as "superstars in the adult literature field" (p. 11) were also saluted for their books written for children: **Gwendolyn Brooks** (Aloneness), **Alice Childress** (A Hero Ain't Nothing But a Sandwich), **Lucille Clifton** (The Times They Used To Be), **Mari Evans** (I Look At Me), **Ernest J. Gains** (A Long Day in November), **Addison Gayle** (Oak and Ivy: A Biography of Paul Lawrence Dunbar), **Nikki Giovanni** (Spin A Soft Black Song), **Rosa Guy**, (The Friends), **Kristin Hunter** (The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou), **John Oliver**

Killens (A Man Ain't Nothin' But A Man), **Julius Lester** (Long Journey Home), **Louise Merriwether** (The Freedom Ship of Robert Smalls), **Ann Petry** (Legends of the Saints), **Sonia Sanchez** (The Adventures of Fathead, Smallhead and Squarehead), **Alice Walker** (Langston Hughes, American Poet), and **John A. Williams** (The Most Native of Sons: A Biography of Richard Wright).

Following a practice commonly found in the African historical and cultural tradition, Mathis also used this special occasion to give honor and praise to her ancestors--fellow writers and champions of black children who she referred to as "those late but great superstars--Arna Bontemps, Langston Hughes, and Countee Cullen--for sharing their talents with the very young" (p. 12).

Mathis' lessons and theories of black love and education were not merely shared in 1974, with her fellow conference participants at the First National Conference of Afro-American Writers, and then forgotten when the excitement of the occasion had ebbed. The very same convictions, and at times, the same words that she used have been repeated by other black authors who may or may not have been in attendance at this first national conference of black writers. Mathis expressed sentiments which were similar to those espoused by Larry Neal a few years earlier when he presented his outline of the black aesthetic and introduced concepts such as transmutation and synthesis, race memory, black love, and the integral unity of culture, politics and art (Neal, 1971) to his fellow writers and to the reading public. Mathis reinforced the idea of the existence of an historical and cultural continuum in her fourth lesson of black love when she expressed her belief that--"**black writers who create**

for children form one endless physical and spiritual line--moving across the land, tireless in their efforts, hoping for the best, but prepared for battle" (1976: 14).

The author continued this image of a moving physical and spiritual line with a roll call of additional black authors whose voices, she contended, rang out through their books to rejoice in the victories of black life and culture: **Alexis Deaveaux** (Na-ni), **Muriel and Tom Feelings** (Moja Means One and Jambo Means Hello), **Helen H. King** (Willy), **Margaret Taylor Burroughs** (Jasper: The Drummin' Boy), **Lorenz Graham** (North Town), and **Al Duckett**("la Vie"--from Glowchild, edited by **Ruby Dee**).

The theory of a unifying spiritual line or bond existing between all African peoples was further developed by cultural anthropologist **Dona Marimba Richards** (1981 and 1985), whose literary voice was recognized in the decade following this 1974 conference as "one of the most influential scholars of African studies and culture" (Asante and Welsh Asante, 1985: x). Richards posits that the depth and strength of their common African spirituality and humanism has allowed African Americans, and other Africans in the diaspora, to survive the many horrors of the Middle Passage ("Maafa") and the subsequent brutality of enslavement. The unconscious shared cultural "ethos" of African peoples, she contends, is spiritual, and a political strength which should be used in the struggle for black liberation (Richards, 1985). It is evident that the Afrocentric continuum of concern and commitment to the well-being of black children which was evident in the writings of black authors from the decades and centuries which preceded the 1974 conference, continues to be reflected in the philosophies and writings of scholars such as Richards, who have been identified (Asante, 1991b) in recent years as leading voices in the Afrocentric Movement, and in the evolving Afrocentric theory.

Another scholar recognized for his Afrocentric research and theory-building, is educational psychologist **Asa Hilliard,** [quoted in the introduction to this chapter] who wrote an article which appeared in a recent issue (September, 1991) of the journal of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum, Educational Leadership. In this article Hilliard explained new findings on the maturation of infants which have challenged long held beliefs about the abilities of children, and which also support his own thesis that "teachers are the mediators who provide or fail to provide the essential experiences that permit students to release their awesome potential. Before this can happen, teachers must believe that this genius truly exists, and that they have the will and the ability to bring it out of their students" (Hilliard, 1991: 35).

When Mathis further explained her lessons of black love expressed by certain authors of children's literature, she described this love as "**life-sustaining, God-like, boundless, and totally Black... a serious, life-directed, thing**" (p. 14). Her concepts and imagery were very similar to the context of the opening address Hilliard presented ten years later (1984) for the Eastern Pennsylvania Spring Regional Workshop, when he presented goals of education based on the Kemetic (Ancient Egypt) world view. The ultimate aim of this African education would be "to become **god-like**." [For details see Literature Review, Chapter 2, p. 60]

Jawanza Kunjufu is another highly respected author and publisher of Afrocentric books for children and adults; and an educational consultant who has frequently presented workshops for parents, teachers, administrators and students throughout the country during the past two decades. In his recent workshops, [which are available on audio and video casettes through African American Images, in Chicago, Illinois] he has continually stressed his belief that **"you can not teach a child you do not love and respect."** To respect the African American child, Kunjufu also contends, you must understand and respect his/her culture. This culture is presented through the "lessons of black love" found in the books Mathis discussed in the "Literature for Young Readers Panel" of the First National Conference of Afro-American Writers. In the 1990's, the continuum of commitment and support for the black child, as discussed by Sharon Bell Mathis, moves on. Parents and educators can use these books as "weapons" of survival, because according to their authors, this was one of the reasons for their existence.

Lorenz Graham, who was born in 1902, and had written his first book for young readers in 1946, was one of the "elders" in the group of African American writers in attendance at this national conference. He was the second speaker on the "Literature for Young Readers Panel," and spoke on the topic "The Task of the Image Makers." Graham was born in New Orleans and received a diverse education at the University of California in Los Angeles, Virginia Union, and New York University's School of Social Work. In addition to writing, he had worked as a teacher at Monrovia College, Liberia, been a probation officer, a social worker, and a camp advisor for the Civilian Conservation Corps. Like Sharon Bell Mathis, Graham had received various awards and citations for his literary efforts before appearing as a presenter on the panel which focused on literature for young readers.

He began his presentation by telling the audience that "writers for young people have a special responsibility and an unavoidable duty to make wholesome images for their readers" (p. 2). He then gave a short history lesson and reminded the participants of the mainstream literary tradition which had promulgated the "Great Lie" created during the slave era, and written into law and literature to justify the enslavement of Africans--"that black people were not really people, without a history, ability, morals, and unable to learn" (p. 3). The greatest tragedy, he contended, was that these skillfully promoted and constantly repeated lies had been accepted as truth not only by white people, but by many black people as well.

By sharing the story of his personal travails in getting published an earlier manuscript which included an unacceptable image of a strong black man, ready and willing to fight to the death if necessary to protect his home from a white mob, Graham was able to expose the historically racist practices of mainstream publishers. They operated in accord with writers and editors to keep "The Great Lie" alive and well. At the same time he was able to show that persistence sometimes pays off. It took twelve years, and the help of an influential black Chicago-based librarian, Charlemae Rollins, but South Town was finally published in 1958, and was reprinted 20 times in subsequent years.

Although Graham had begun his writing career in the pre-Civil Rights Era, he also spoke to his younger colleagues about the necessity of using their art for the **survival** of black youth:

> ...I would say to those special writers for young readers, beautiful black writers for young readers, I pray that you give your readers images with hope, with strength, with courage, with love for that which is good and right, [Afrocentric axiological issue] and with the determination to fight for justice. Give them images that will make them know they must not yield to despair, that they must not accept a gospel of inferiority of themselves or of their race...Help them to know that 'Black is Indeed Beautiful'. Help them to say with justifiable pride 'I Am Somebody'...
> (Graham, 1976b: 11-12)

The third speaker on the Literature for Young Readers Panel was **June Jordan**, who had been praised by her fellow panelist, Sharon Bell Mathis, for her book His Own Where (1971). Apparently, many others who were in the business of evaluating books for children had agreed with Mathis' assessment of this publication, for the book was a National Book Award finalist and an American Library Association Best Book for young adults. Jordan was born in Harlem, New York during the depression years (1936), and grew up in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. She attended Barnard College and the University of Chicago before becoming an English teacher at several different colleges and universities. She has also received numerous awards and grants for her various writings, which include essays, poetry, newspaper articles and books for young people (1969, 1979, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1981). Her work has appeared in publications such as the New York Times, Partisan Review, Village Voice, and The Nation.

Jordan chose what appeared to be the most common theme of the members of this panel for the focus of her presentation--"Towards A **Survival** Literature For Afrikan-Amerikan Children." Like her two colleagues who preceded her on the program, she began by stressing the importance of the role black writers had in empowering the black child:

> respecting ourselves, and how we choose to use time, there is no way that we can undertake the writing of books for Afrikan-Amerikan children, unless we view our work as necessary parts of a literature that will help our children to survive. The stakes are just that high. The odds are just that stacked--against our children, here, and in Africa. (Jordan, 1976: 1)

The major difference between Jordan and her fellow panelists was her inclusion of a global perspective, and what she referred to as the necessity for understanding the jeopardy which existed for all non-white children, especially those in America and in Africa. The cause of this jeopardy, she contended, was "the Deadly and Absurd Perspective of White America," which had caused global hunger, famine, and starvation for non-white children of the world; and was the natural result of "Amerikan Greed/Amerikan Over-Consumption/Amerikan Waste" (p. 2). Reminding her fellow writers of the necessity of using their "word power" to challenge the "White Force" which was physically and mentally destroying Afrikan children, she stressed the importance of **Black culture**, which had been eliminated to a large degree in the nation's mass media in the years following the Black Power Movement of the sixties. She stressed her conviction that "without culture a people do not survive; we subsist, at best" (Jordan, 1976: 1).

One aspect of culture which Jordan felt was at great risk was "Black English" [Ebonics], which she felt was being attacked through the compulsory public school systems, along with the innocent black children who spoke this language. She explained to her fellow writers that "without language, a people cannot hold to a consciousness of community, nor can we compose and transmit a history that includes our history of survival by distinctively Black, cultural means (Jordan, 1976: 2).

Jordan also listed the rapid demise of Black Studies programs across the country which had been designed for failure a few years earlier; and the shrinking admission rates of black students over the past five years. Her advice to her fellow writers was that they write stories which told the truth in place of the euphemisms used by the Establishment; that they make a mockery of the "Deadly and Absurd Perspective;" that they write their stories in Black language; and most important of all, that they write stories that "preserve the living, struggling, needful spirit from extinction" (p. 2). Very similar to the authors who preceded her on the panel, Jordan also introduced ideas which would continue to appear in the literature of Afrocentric theorists.

The last member of the panel to speak, and the youngest member of the group, was **John Lewis Steptoe.** He was only twenty-four years old when he participated on "The Literature for

Young Readers Panel," but his own reputation as an author and illustrator of Afrocentric books for children was also well establish. Steptoe was born in 1950, in Brooklyn, New York, and attended the New York School of Art and Design. His first published book, Stevie, was written and illustrated when he was only sixteen and seventeen years of age. Writing and/or illustrating nearly one book a year after this first successful book, Steptoe had six published works by 1974, the year of the First National Conference of Afro-American Writers (Steptoe, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1973, 1974a, 1974b).

The title of his presentation was very straightforward--"On Writing Children's Literature." He explained that although his first books had all been written for children, he was sure his approach would not change when he switched his focus to adult literature. This was because all of his writing would be grounded in truth and respect for its intended audience. In Steptoe's opinion, race was not that significant a factor to the members of the power structure, (i.e., white upper class), but merely a tool to gain what was really important--money and power. The young artist contended that to survive in a world where the main game was controlled by those with power and money, one would have to be able to to use one's intellect and understand the nature of this game so that it could not be used against their mental and physical well-being.

The books that Steptoe writes may be classified as books for children, but he insisted that when he writes, he writes for the **entire family.** In this respect, his books followed the same pattern as traditional African and African American oral literature:

stories, folktales, and fables. They may have been presented as literature for the young, but they had lessons for the older members of the family as well. To decide what to include in a book for children, he suggested that writers merely think of what they would want their own child to know, then decide how to say this in a creative manner. When the work is finished, Steptoe declared, it should fill the needs of both the child and the parent, for parent and child equals **family.** This concept also reinforces Afrocentric paradigms which stress family and group solidarity.

Contrary to the older writers who appeared on the panel, Steptoe did not say that his books were exclusively for black children, or just for children. He insisted that he was no longer "an angry young man," a soldier intent on combatting the evils of white society. While he recognized that black people had definite needs and scars left by what he referred to as a neglectful society, his goal was simply to address our "humanness, which stands as a common denominator" (p. 3). There was a subtle irony in the remarks made by this talented young artist, for while he was attempting to simply address **human** needs and concerns through his literary creations, he had also created works which were very much **Afrocentric**, especially in their reflection of the beauty and strength of the black family and of black life. Even at the youthful age twenty-four years, Steptoe was obviously a very self-assured, grounded, and independent-thinking young man. Not only was he self-assured about his brilliant artistic talent, for which he had received early recognition and praise, but he was also self-assured in knowing that he was an intelligent human being, and an American with a rich African ancestry and cultural legacy. The ethos (collective spirit) of the most ancient portion of Steptoe's African ancestry and cultural legacy appeared to be very close to him when he spoke to his fellow African American writers and artists and shared his inner-most thoughts: "...we must create for ourselves a life situation which demands that we know truth, a situation which makes evident the possibilities of broadening our chances for survival" (Steptoe, 1976: 4).

This cosmological vision, or world-view, which placed the attainment of truth in a central position in a questing life was very similar to the Ancient Egyptian concept of *Ma'at*. This was "a social, ethical, and rhetorical term understood by ancient Egyptians to mean justice, truth, [my emphasis] harmony, and the divine order of nature" (Asante, 1990: 83). In his desire to address children as people for whom he had great respect, and who merely happened to be in the early stages of the development of their intellectual capacities, Steptoe explained that he wrote books to support children's intellectual development. With intelligence, he contended, the possibilities for attaining truth are greater; and once armed with truth, one's chances for survival would be enhanced.

By adding this spiritual dimension to the panel presentation on literature for young readers, it became evident [at least to those who were familiar with the full African American literary tradition] that the words and work of the writers who had gathered in the nation's capital on November 8, 1974, to discuss "The Image of Black Folk in American Literature," demonstrated that "the circle had not been broken." The connections and bonds which existed between the

"Word Workers" who participated in the conference and their ancestors from the ancient and recent past were very strong, even though the purpose for the gathering was to build unity and strength and to chart a path for the future. This particular panel of writers, Sharon Bell Mathis, Lucille Clifton, Lorenz Graham, June Jordan, and John Steptoe, were simply five of the most outstanding writers in attendance that weekend who had chosen to share their words of "black love" with those important members of their extended families who were what Mathis called "the younger version of themselves."

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE 70'S

In "The Playwriting Panel," also scheduled for the first day of the two day conference, a presentation had been given by **Richard Wesley** entitled "New Directions for the 70's." Wesley provided an excellent up to date overview and status of the African American literary tradition in the mid-seventies. He began by explaining to his colleagues that the decade of the 70's presented a challenge to those who were "guardians of the literature of American-born people of African decent," for they were at a cross-roads in some respects. African American writers had to decide once and for all whether they were going to break with the conventional literary forms, including both styles and techniques, which had evolved from the European or Western literary tradition; or develop the "untapped well" which held their common African heritage or ethos. This was a step that African American musicians, had already taken, but in his opinion, African American writers had not. Wesley then suggested that his fellow writers look to their African brothers who had already managed to break away from the Western literary tradition for their models and developed that which was uniquely their own:

> even when our instructors are completely in accord with the nationalist and Pan-Africanist theorems of the past ten years, or so, we often find that on very subtle levels they must cling to tired structural ideas about plot development, character development, etc. This is why we find ourselves in such awe of such African writers as **Senghor**, **Achebe**, or **Tutuola**-- men who have turned their backs on European models and have developed their writing on the old time story-telling techniques of the travelling griots. (Wesley, 1976: 1)

Wesley continued his presentation by acknowledging that his call for a "new direction" was not an original challenge. He identified others in the African American past, including Alain Locke and Langston Hughes, who had made similar pleas to their fellow writers of the 1930's and 40's; and others, such as Richard Wright, who had answered their call and set the stage for the following generation of writers. In spite of the continuing development of the African American literary tradition which celebrated the uniqueness of the African American's ethnicity, Wesley felt that his fellow writers had always stopped short of going all the way to that "untapped, unchartered region of our psyches that will allow us to create writings for which critical criteria have yet to be established" (p. 1).

Wesley did not suggest, as some earlier Black Nationalist artists had, that it was necessary to break away from Western literary tradition because Western society was a decadent, dying, and immoral model that would only lead African Americans to a similar self-destruction; but he did remind his fellow writers that **Larry Neal,** a major voice of the Black Arts Movement, had left theoretical guidelines for them to follow a few years earlier that had not been fully addressed. By looking within their own cultural past and present, as Neal had recommended earlier, the African American writers of the 70's could use their artistic creations to reconstruct the black family, strengthen black man/black woman relationships, chart new political directions, and address other issues important for the survival of their people (Wesley, 1976).

Although Wesley's remarks had been made on the playwriting panel of the conference, an examination of the individual and collective work of several African American writers in the years following this landmark conference, including those writers who wrote primarily for young readers, should reveal whether or not the "new direction" called for earlier by Larry Neal, and reemphasized by Richard Wesley, was actually followed. One reality which should be very clear is that their common call was an **Afrocentric** one, spoken to, about, and primarily for the enhancement of African Americans. The days of speaking about African people, but not to them, were gone. The special needs of black children [including their educational needs], black families, and the black community had become the first and major agenda items, followed by broad humanistic issues and concerns. The days where integration and concern for white recognition and acceptance of black reality and black contributions to American history and culture were also a thing of the past, or at least, a non-issue at this historic first national conference of African American writers. The survival of African American children has remained an important issue for writers aware of the psychological damage caused by contributors to the American and Western literary traditions in past years, and the potential for continued damage in the present and in the future. A common objective of African American writers for children and young adults has been to arm their youth with appropriate weapons of truth found in the history and culture of African peoples.

BLACK WOMEN WRITERS OF ADOLESCENT LITERATURE IN THE 80'S

More than a decade after the First National Conference of Afro-American Writers was held, an article which provided an assesment of black women writers who wrote adolescent literature was published in an educational journal. The author, Norfolk State University professor of English, Rosalie B. Kiah, reviewed the work of fourteen African American female writers of books for adolescents, several of whom had attended and/or presented papers at the earlier conference: Alice Childress, Eloise Greenfield, Nikki Grimes, Rosa Guy, Virginia Hamilton, Joyce Hansen, Kristen Hunter, June Jordan, Sharon Bell Mathis, Dindga McCannon, Ellease

Southerland, Mildred Taylor, Joyce Carol Thomas, Mildred Pitts Walter, and Brenda Wilkinson.

Kiah explained that by the late sixties, with the help of organizations such as the **Council on Interracial Books for Children**, which had sponsored writing contests with the goal of identifying writers who were able to authentically recreate the black experience in books for children, several African American female authors of adolescent literature were published and gained recognition for their work. She acknowledged that these authors were following in the footsteps of their sisters from earlier generations, such as Zora Neale Hurston, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Jessie Redmond Fauset, from the Harlem Renaissance era of the 20's and 30's; and Gwendolyn Brooks and Margaret Walker Alexander from the 40's and 50's. At the same time the members of the younger generation were charting new ground, for the "Black Perspective" of the post Civil Rights and Black Power Eras had changed the focus of black writing in various ways.

Kiah reiterated the observations noted above which were reflected in the presentations made in the "Literature for Young Readers Panel" at the First National Conference of Afro-American Writers. She then identified three common components of the black experience which could also be found in the work of all fourteen black female authors--"the patrimony of Africa, the patrimony of domination, and the patrimony of survival" (Kiah, 1987: 175) While acknowledging the human experience, Kiah explained, these women also captured the experience which is unique to black people:

The patrimony of Africa acknowledges the legacy of history and culture which were lost by Africans in the diaspora who were ripped from their homelands and enslaved in the "New World;"

The patrimony of domination and dependency is a reflection of the outcome of the period of enslavement, which reinforced and institutionalized the inequalities and injustices of the slave era--the cycle of enslavement, to an unskilled labor force, to political powerlessness and economic domination, throughout history to the present;

The patrimony of survival celebrates the African American's racial resilience, historical defiance, and refusal to passively accept slavery, injustice, and domination. Recognition is given to the institutions which gave this strength, resilience, and the will to survive, including the extended family, the church, sororities, lodges, fraternities, etc. (p. 175).

In addition to these three components, Kiah found three common themes throughout the black fictional works of these black female authors. These included:

1) the search for freedom and dignity, which could be subdivided into two categories:

a) contemporary stories which have major characters that must learn to handle problems of identity and self-esteem--found in Rosa Guy's Ruby, Edith Jackson, The Disappearance, and The New Guys; Kristen Hunter's The Soul Brother and Sister Lou, and Lou and the Limelight; Dindga McCannon's Wilhemina Jones, Future Star; and Ellease Southerland's Let the Lion Eat Straw; and

b) stories from the past with characters who had to struggle to overcome the injustices and roadblocks placed in their paths to maintain their humanity and dignity--found in Mildred Pitts Walter's Girl on the Outside and Because We Are, both set in the desegregation era; Virginia Hamilton's The House of Drear, which returns contemporary characters to the slave era; in Mildred Taylor's Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry and Let the Circle Be Unbroken, set in the depression period.

2) the necessity for thinking and reacting independently, and doing what is necessary and right without outside prodding. These themes are demonstrated in Sharon Bell Mathis' Teacup Full of Roses and Listen for the Fig Tree; and Alice Childress' M.C. Higgins, the Great.

3) surviving physically and mentally by directly confronting their environment, which is most typically the inner city, with all of the expected problems of poverty, violence, and family dysfunction. This theme is depicted in the Mathis and Hunter books, as well as Alice Childress' A Hero Ain't Nothing But a Sandwich, Eloise Greenfield's Sister, and Virginia Hamilton's The Planet of Junior Brown.

4) the universal themes of comfort, shared understandings, and group identity within peer groups and parent-child relationships, found in Growin' by Nikki Grimes; A Little Love by Virginia Hamilton; His Own Where by June Jordan; The Friends by Rosa Guy; Sister by Eloise Greenfield; Teacup Full of

Roses and Listen for the Fig Tree by Sharon Bell Mathis; and Brenda Wilkinson's trilogy of Ludell: Ludell, Ludell and Willie, and Ludell's New York Times; and Joyce Carol Thomas' Marked By Fire and Bright Shadow. (pp. 175-176)

In spite of their demonstrated literary abilities and their cultural sensitivity, by the mid eighties few of these women were getting published. The national concern for publishing works which reflected the experiences of all Americans in books for children and adolescents, which followed the black cultural revolution of the 60's, seemed to have faded as soon as the federal grants to purchase multiple copies of these books for libraries and schools were discontinued. Kiah noted that there were fewer books being published for and about black children in 1987, than there had been a decade or more earlier.

By 1992, the impact of increasing Afrocentric consciousness in African American communities throughout the country, and the resultant national call for "multi-culturalism," [the educational "buss word" of the 1990's] in the curriculum, has once again made publishers sensitive to the "value" of books by African American authors. Perhaps some of the earlier titles which were allowed to go out of print will be reissued, along with new creations.

To demonstrate more fully a method for evaluating books for children and adolescents, and for determining their instructional value for decreasing educational deficits for African American children, two well-respected authors of Afrocentric books for children and young adults (**Eloise Greenfield** and **Walter Dean**

Myers) and several of their books written during the past two decades will be explored in the following two chapters. Afrocentric paradigms identified in recent (since 1966) pedagogical literature, and translated into questions as identified in chapter one, and analyzed in chapter two, will be utilized as guideposts for the analyses. These questions are as follows:

1) Does the author place Africa or African peoples at the center of his or her discourse? (Asante, 1987, 1989, and 1990)

2) Does the major theme of the work recognize or reward behavior which supports community or group interest rather than individual accomplishments and self-interest? Is the Black family presented in a positive manner? (Boateng, 1990; Karenga, 1989; and Neal, 1966)

3) Does the theme (or themes) directly or indirectly celebrate aspects of African/African American culture (i.e., language, music, art, dance, religion, mythology, folklore, etc.)? (Neal, 1989b; Boykin, 1983; and Asante and Welsh-Asante, 1990)

4) Does the work reflect or demonstrate components of the African aesthetic, i.e., call-and-response, multi-dimensionality, multi-rhythms, holism, etc.? (Thompson, 1966; Mbiti, 1970; and Welsh-Asante, 1993)

5) Are African/African American characters depicted as subjects rather than objects in the work? (i.e., Does the plot evolve from their own actions, rather than what is done to them by others?) (Asante, 1990)

6.) When male and female characters interact, is sexism avoided and sexual complementarity the normative relationship? (Keto, 1989; and Asante, 1990)

7) Are axiological issues (values) culturally distinct and important components of the central theme and/or plot? Are "good" and "beautiful" synonymous concepts in this work? (Neal, 1989b; Akbar, 1984; and Boykin, 1986)

8) Does the work help to address or answer cosmological issues, such as Why am I here? and How do I fit into the grand design of humankind, nature or with the Supreme Being? (Mbiti, 1970; and Richards, 1990)

9) Is the major character or group depicted in conflict or harmony with nature? (Asante, 1990; Mbiti, 1970; Richards, 1990; Boykins, 1986; and Diop, 1978)

10) Does spirituality have a positive role in the plot or tone of the work? Is there a spiritual component in the theme? (Richards, 1990; Boykins, 1986; Mbiti, 1970; and Karenga, 1984b)

11) Is the reality or worldview (present or historical) of the students acknowledged or reinforced in the work? (Karenga, 1984a; Irvine, 1990; Hale-Benson, 1985; Brooks, 1985; Karenga and Carruthers, 1986; and Boykin, 1986)

12) Does the work recognize or reflect cultural and individual differences without hegemonic attitudes, racism, classism or sexism? (Asante, 1987 and 1990; Anderson, 1988; Keto, 1989)

13) Is there an overall tone of victorious consciousness apparent in the work? (Neal, 1989; Kunjufu, 1984; Brooks, 1985; Asante, 1987; Karenga, 1989; and Chinweizu, 1977)

14) Is Ancient Egypt (Kemet) presented as a "classical" reference point for African history and culture? (Hilliard, 1985; Karenga and Carruthers, 1986; and Diop, 1974)

15) When the plot is historically grounded are incidents factual and are characters honestly portrayed? (Karenga, 1984a [See illustration on page 33, Chapter 1]

NOTES

CHAPTER 4

[1] In the preface of his 1990 publication, The Book of Coming Forth By Day (University of Sankore Press), Maulana Karenga explained that the objective of the text was to continue the rescue and reconstructing of the sacred and secular literature of ancient Kemet,as recommended by Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop. For additional explorations of ancient Kemetic or Egyptian literature see Karenga's Selections from the Husia: Sacred Wisdom of Ancient Egypt, Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 1984, Cheikh Anta Diop, Civilization ou Barbarie, Paris: Presence Africaine, 1981, and E. A. Wallis Budge's The Book of the Dead, New York: University Books, 1960.

[2] See Kenneth Stamp, The Peculiar Institution, New York: Alfred Knopf, Inc.

[3] See Herbert Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts, New York: International Publishers, 1943; Joseph Carroll, Slave Insurrections in the U.S., Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1938; and Mary S. Locke, Anti-Slavery in America, Boston, 1901, cited by John Hope Franklin in From Slavery to Freedom, Third Edition, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967, p. 662.

[4] See Rayford Logan, The Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson, New York: Collier Books, 1965.

CHAPTER 5

ELOISE GREENFIELD: STRONG VOICE FOR BLACK CHILDREN

> Writing is my work. It is work that is in harmony with me; it sustains me. I want through my work, to help sustain children...Through the written word I want to give children a love for the arts that will provoke creative thought and activity...I want to encourage children to develop positive attitudes toward themselves and their abilities, to love themselves...I want to present to children alternative methods for coping with the negative aspects of their lives and to inspire them to seek new ways of solving problems... to use their good times as stepping stones, as bridges, to get over the hard times...I want to give children an appreciation for the contributions of their elders...that make daily survival possible...I want to give children a true knowledge of Black heritage, including both the African and the American experiences...A true history must be the concern of every Black Writer...I want stories that will allow children to fall in love with genuine Black heros and heroines who have proved themselves to be outstanding in ability and dedication to the cause of Black freedom...who deserve our love and respect for the right reasons...I want to reflect back to children and to reinforce the positive aspects of their lives... the strength of the Black family...I want to be one of those who can choose and order words that children will want to celebrate. I want to make them shout and laugh and blink back tears and care about themselves. They are our future. They are beautiful. They are for loving. (Greenfield, 1975c: 624-626)

INTRODUCTION

Eloise Greenfield spoke the above words, "Books Open Minds," on May 13, 1975, at the *International Reading Association-Children's Book Council Preconvention Institute*, in New York City. Earlier that same year (1975) she had received a citation for the body of her work from the *Council on Interracial Books for Children.* The very positive and culturally specific personal testimony which she gave to the IRA provided a clear picture of Greenfield's "location," or her centrality in relation to African culture and African peoples. Even though the spoken word is a very powerful medium in traditional and contemporary African and African American culture (Asante, 1990), history has demonstrated that actions must also be considered if one is to determine whether an individual is truly centered in his/her culture. At the time she spoke these poignant words Greenfield had already begun to achieve, through her growing body of literature for children, all that she had hoped to achieve; and over the next seventeen years of her career as a writer, she accomplished more than even she had dreamed. In this chapter I examine her life and several of her books for children to demonstrate my belief that she is an excellent example of the Afrocentric authors who have chosen to use their literary gifts to speak to and for all children, but especially for the Black child. Several of her books may be used as the basis of instruction of Black Literature.

Each of the Afrocentric paradigms drawn from post-Black Power/Black Arts Movement pedagogical literature written to address the educational deficits and needs of African American children, and transformed into questions to aid in the evaluation/selection and instruction of Black Literature (Nos. 1 - 15), may be answered affirmatively in one or several of Greenfield's books. The year before Greenfield shared her special vision for Black children with the members of the *International Reading*

Association, Sharon Bell Mathis had discussed the author and her book for young adolescents, Sister (1974b), during a presentation entitled, "Black Writers and Children: Lessons in Black Love," at the First National Conference of Afro-American Writers. Greenfield was not one of the presenters on the panel which discussed literature for young readers that day, and she may or may not have been in attendance at this premier conference held in her home city, but Mathis had included Greenfield's name in the list of authors which she believed were demonstrating love and concern for black children through the characters, plots, and themes developed in their books. Mathis told the group in attendance on November 8, 1974, that Greenfield 's book reflected "a total belief in the necessity for more fully educated Black children" (Mathis, 1974a: 7). The kind of education Greenfield portrayed, according to Mathis, was not found in traditional schools or classrooms of the 1970's, but was found in various "independent freedom schools" which were opening across the country to teach and celebrate African culture and values.

Eighteen years have passed since this first national conference of Afro-American writers, and Sharon Bell Mathis continues to participate in local and national conferences to share her personal assessment and concern for the status of Black Literature and books for children. She also continues to recommend books by Eloise Greenfield, both old and new titles, as examples of the kind of books that black children need "to validate their own experiences," and which reflect the love and respect their author truly has for them (Mathis, 1992). An endorsement such as this, from one dedicated and successful writer about another specializing in the same genre, is a significant indicator of an individual author's success in his or her chosen field.

"LOCATING" ELOISE GREENFIELD

To gain a fuller understanding of Eloise Greenfield--the wife; the mother; the teacher; the writer who is highly respected by the members of her profession, especially her fellow black writers who share her love and dedication to the cause of "saving the African American child"; and the recipient of numerous awards for excellence over the past two decades for her poetry, biographies, fiction, and picture books for young children--one would have to go back in time to the year of the Great Depression, to Parmele, a small rural town in North Carolina. This was the year (1929) and the place where Eloise was born into a very close knit family, the second oldest of five children. Her family was no different from many other American families which experienced the ravages of the nation's depressed economy on a very personal level; but unlike most other families, the strong love that was also present in the Greenfield household left a more lasting impression on the family than the poverty they had to over come during those difficult years (Greenfield and Little, .1979).

1929 has also been identified as the official end of the tremendous literary explosion of African American letters referred to by cultural historians as the Harlem Renaissance (Huggins, 1971). In spite of the success and acknowledged literary genius of Jean Toomer, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Wallace Thurman, Jessie Fauset, and other authors whose voices were heard during the Renaissance era; the vast majority of books published for children, which supposedly represented African American life and culture continued to present grotesque stereotypes as faithful illustrations of black reality. The damage caused by these false images, according to social scientist St. Clair Drake (1990), is still apparent in the nation's poor race relations and cultural understanding. Eloise Greenfield's entrance into the world at this significant point in time could be interpreted as a sign of the unbroken chain of African American literary voices which continued to emerge throughout the decades to challenge the racist status quo which typified the national and Western world's literary traditions.

Although the historical backdrop of her childhood days could be described as bleak, her autobiography and interviews reveal that the individual circumstances of Greenfield's family life were the most important factors in molding the individual who became a prize-winning author of literature for children. While she was still an infant, her nuclear family moved to Washington, DC in search of better education and work opportunities. Like Richard Wright, whose family also left the South in search of a better life during the depression years, Eloise loved tp read. She was also happy to be able to take advantage of the many books in the public library near her new home. Unlike Wright, Greenfield grew up in a strong black family with a father and mother who also appreciated books and reading as an important part of their own lives. While Wright had to seek friendship and support for his interest in writing from the members of the Communist party, Eloise had all of the support she needed within her own family and the black communities they belonged to in Washington, DC and in Parmele, North Carolina. In discussions of her childhood Greenfield explains (1985, 1886a, and 1979) that her memories are pleasurable ones because of the family, friends, and neighbors which shared her reality.

THE EARLY YEARS

The best account of Greenfield's early years are found in one of her books for children (grade 5 and up), Childtimes: A Three-Generation Memoir (1979), which she co-authored with her mother, Lessie Jones Little, with material from her grandmother, Pattie Ridley Jones. The book covers life in rural North Carolina from the middle of the 1800's, when Pattie's grandmother (Mary Eliza Barnes) was a little girl working as a slave on a pre-Civil War plantation; to the 1940's, in the inner city of Washington, DC, where Eloise grew up with her parents, brothers and sisters, and friends. In the introduction of the book Greenfield explained that even though the specific childtimes of three females in one family--grandmother, mother, and daughter--are retold for the reader, this story did not begin with those writing it, for these ladies were:

> ...just three marchers in a procession that stretches long and wide. Stretches across the ocean to the continent of Africa, back to great-grandmothers and great-grandfathers and great-greats and great-great-greats, and on and on, and all the way back to the beginning of human life on earth. Stretches outward to sisters and brothers and aunts and uncles and nephews and nieces and cousins. A long,wide,

> family procession with thousands of marchers.
> We are just three. (Greenfield and Little, 1979: 1)

In this brief introduction it is possible to see that Greenfield not only placed Africa and African peoples at the center of her discourse (#1), but she also incorporated cosmological issues, i.e., Why am I here? and How do I fit into the grand design of humankind? (#8), into her text. It was also possible, through sharing her own and her mother and grandmother's personal childhood memories, for Greenfield to fulfill her personal dream of helping African American children to "develop an appreciation of the contributions of their elders which made survival possible" (1975c: 624). Undoubtedly the memories of the childtimes of these three women were probably very similar to the memories of many other African American children who lived during the same periods. When today's children read these stories with their parents, grandparents, or teachers, they will have many opportunities to discuss the historical realities of each generation represented in the book, as well as the similar and different remembrances which their stories will generate.

Recent curriculum guidelines and goals for teaching social studies in the primary grades suggest that the child's base of knowledge and skills be built on "appropriate history and social sciences, but integrated with language arts, literature, and science, where advantageous" (Bragaw and Hartoonian, 1988: 18). For the African American student, it would not only be "appropriate," but educationally advantageous to view historical and social events in the 19th and 20th centuries through the eyes of other children and families which share the same racial, historical, and cultural heritage. The stories in Childtimes could be used by the primary classroom teacher to provide basic notions of history and historical method by first investigating the black child's perceptions of self, and then expanding his/her consciousness from the individual to the family (immediate and extended), the community, and finally to state and national events. This collection of childhood memories of three generations, including a daughter, mother, and grandmother, would be very helpful in personalizing this process. Children could be encouraged to communicate with their own family members, and to create a family tree similar to the one provided in this book, to prepare an historical time-line, or to develop a geographical representation or maps of any migrations which occurred in their immediate or extended families over the past years. In addition to listening to and reading these stories, older children can use them as models to write and share stories of their own families, friends, special holiday celebrations, games, favorite foods, memorable trips to visit relatives, famous people and events from their time period, some sad times they have experienced, and happy times which have brought laughter and joy into their lives. Both younger and older children can be helped to understand that "they can use their good times as stepping stones, as bridges, to get over the hard times," (Greenfield, 1975c: 625) that life will ultimately bring [#11]. Along with helping children to understand some of the pain and pleasures of life which must be overcome to make daily survival possible, this book may also be used to help all children understand and appreciate important elements of African American culture and the black aesthetic [#3], such as black music. The following quote explains how very important music was to Eloise and her family:

> My brother Wilbur plays the music called jazz, plays it on a stand-up bass in concert halls and nightclubs all over the world. Black music. It has always been part of our lives. It's so much a part of me that if you could somehow subtract it from who I am, I would be a stranger to myself. I wouldn't know how to act. Spirituals, gospel, blues, rhythm-and-blues, jazz. Black music. (p. 169)

The Littles visited Eloise's paternal grandparents and relatives who lived in Parmele, North Carolina; and they also shared warm memories of visits South to the home of her mother's parents and his relatives. Eloise's maternal grandparents lived in Norfolk, Virginia and were devout members of the Mount Zion Church of God--Holiness. Her grandfather was a quiet, deeply religious man, who loved to read the newspaper. He was a member of Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association "which met regularly to talk about the beauty and strength of blackness and to plan the return of black people to Africa" (Greenfield, 1979: 156).

One incident which occurred during a visit to Norfolk when Eloise was about twelve years old was not a pleasant memory; and it probably remained with her, helping to shape the individual who would later in life choose Mrs. Rosa Parks as an African American heroine worth remembering through a biography for children. Eloise was taking her first bus ride alone to visit one her cousins when she was embarrassed by a drunken white man who angrily reminded the child that "her place" was in the back of the crowded bus (p. 161).

She had forgotten that the buses in the South, unlike those in Washington, DC at that time, were segregated. What disturbed young Eloise the most was the way the other white men and women standing near her on the bus looked away from her embarrassment, but still appeared to condone this unfair treatment. Later in life she discovered a way to expunge this unpleasant memory.

EARLY CAREER AND BIOGRAPHIES FOR CHILDREN

After leaving Miner Teachers college in 1949, Eloise began to work as a clerk-typist in the U.S. Patent Office. She began writing in the early 1950's as part of her personal search for satisfying work. She married her childhood sweetheart and began to raise her family. Although she had loved to read all of her life, and even had a special affinity for words, enjoying "their sounds, and rhythms, and even some of their aberrations, such as homonyms and silent letters..." (1986a: 216), she had never thought of writing as a career until she became a mother and realized how few good books were available to help black children see themselves in positive ways, and to encourage them to dare to achieve great things. Although training herself to be a good writer was not an easy task, she continued to work to perfect the craft until some of her pieces were finally accepted for publication. By 1973, she had become Writer-in-Residence at the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, and published her first biography for children, Rosa Parks. The book was highly praised by the National Council for Social Studies and received the organization's first *Carter G. Woodson Award.* This publication was her first attempt to fulfill one of her goals for writing--"to write stories that will show genuine Black heros and heroines who have proved themselves to be outstanding in ability and in dedication to the cause of Black freedom...who deserve our love and respect for the *right* reasons" (1975c: 624). At the same time, the book was possibly her personal way of finally laying to rest the painful childhood incident on the segregated bus in Norfolk when she was embarrassed and made to feel helpless against the blatant injustice and unfairness of segregation laws.

Greenfield's biography of Rosa Parks did not begin with the Montgomery bus incident which brought the quiet seamstress into the national limelight, spearheaded the modern Civil Rights Movement, and initiated the national prominence of the young Montgomery minister, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; instead, Greenfield began her story with the very young girl named Rosa, who struck back when a little white boy pushed her for no reason while walking on a street in Montgomery, Alabama. In her book, which was written for children ages six to ten, her heroine is depicted as an ordinary individual who stands up for fairness and justice, instead of merely accepting the status quo which segregation, the Ku Klux Klan, and legalized discrimination represented in the South where Eloise lived and visited as a child. Greenfield did not depict Rosa as an isolated individual, but as part of a family and a community of African American men, women and children with a tradition of facing injustice head on, in spite of the consequences:

> Sometimes at night, Rosa would not go to bed. She knew that at any minute the KKK might break into her home and beat up or

> kill the whole family. So shy sat up, listening and waiting with her grandfather, who kept a shotgun nearby. (p.4)

Rosa was also depicted as a child who had been taught values, self pride, and respect for her people. She was not a heroine merely because she stood up [or sat down] for her rights on a segregated Montgomery bus, but because she was a warrior in her people's continuous struggles for the liberation and fair treatment in American society:

> With her mother's help, Rosa was able to grow up proud of her self and other black people... her mother taught her not to judge people by the amount of money they had or the kinds of houses they lived in or the clothes they wore [today's mom might add, the price of the jewelry on their body or the cost of the sneakers on their feet]. People should be judged by the respect they have for themselves and others... Rosa grew up believing this. (p. 8)

Greenfield's first biography for children had an overall tone of victorious consciousness (#13), and at the same time it provided an opportunity for discussion of important axiological issues (#7) (values), which are needed so much in today's society. As in the traditional African worldview, this heroine can be described as beautiful, not for her physical attributes, but because she does the right thing, and because she is a good person (Asante, 1990). The book was also historically grounded and based on factual people, places and events (#15) from the African American experience. In the immediate years following the success of the Rosa Parks biography, Greenfield published two additional biographies for the

Crowell Children's Series--Paul Robeson (1975a), illustrated by George Ford; and Mary McLeod Bethune (1977b), illustrated by Jerry Pinkney.

Greenfield's second biography for young readers (Grades 1 - 5), Paul Robeson, won the Jane Addams Book Award in 1976. Just as she had done in her first Crowell biography, Greenfield captured the spirit of victory (#13) achieved by a real life African American hero who the author felt deserved to be loved and respected by children. While Eloise felt a special bond to Rosa Parks because of the courage the civil rights leader had shown by refusing to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery bus, Greenfield most likely also shared a special connection with Paul Robeson, but for several different reasons. Robeson was a strong talented black man who loved words, both written and spoken, just as Eloise loved them, and just as her father, mother, and grandmother had loved them as well. As a child Paul, like Eloise, had a very close and supportive relationship with his family, especially his father. The elder Robeson gave his son the same strong sense of pride in his race and in his African heritage that Eloise had received when she was a child from her parents and grandparents. Because of his father's teachings, Paul became another African American freedom fighter who did all he could to destroy injustice and inequality in the United States (#2), in Africa, and throughout the world. Greenfield wanted to help African American children feel the same strong connection to Africa (#1) that Paul felt. Her biography explained the love and the closeness Robeson felt for Africa--"the people and languages, the stories and poetry, the music and art. Because he was black, he felt very close to Africa" (p. 240). Using simple direct language Greenfield explained the many struggles the boy, and later the man, had to endure before he achieved the victory (#13) he and his people deserved. Like Rosa Parks, Robeson was a hero "for the right reasons," (#7) because he dedicated his life to improving the quality of life for his own people and all people unjustly treated.

The third biography Greenfield contributed to the Crowell series was written in honor of a very special African American female educator, Mary McLeod Bethune. Through this biography Greenfield wished to help young readers understand the importance of education, and how much their ancestors had struggled and sacrificed to obtain an education in this country, and to insure that their following generations would have the right to receive a good education as well. Like Paul Robeson, Mary Bethune loved going to school, learning, and was an excellent student that shared her knowledge with her people. Mary McLeod Bethune is depicted as another dedicated and determined soldier in the African American's struggle for justice and freedom. She had both the democratic and spiritual values (#7) that Greenfield believed were worth emulating, as well as a strong respect for her African heritage. Bethune's life reflects the importance of hard work, faith, family and community support (#2) in the history of African Americans who attain success in life. Like Rosa Parks and Paul Robeson, Mary McLeod Bethune is presented as an African American hero who deserves to be respected and loved by black children and adults. Greenfield received a Coretta Scott King runner-up (Honor Book) award for the book in 1978.

Unlike other biographies of black heros, traditionally written by authors who never truly understood or appreciated the culture of their protagonist [i.e., Newbery Prize book Amos Fortune, Free Man (1950) written by Elizabeth Yates, and critiqued by MacCann (1985)], Greenfield wrote her biographies for young readers from a strong foundation of love and respect for both the culture and the individual; she then authenticated her portrayal through serious study and research. The individual books she presented to children had to be historically and culturally correct (#15), displaying strong positive characters, not the racist stereotypes or ethnocentric fantasies which were previously included in award winning children's books in the American literary tradition (MacCann, 1985).

PICTURE BOOKS FOR THE YOUNG CHILD

In the fifth edition of Children and Books (1977), Southerland and Arbuthnot provided very simple criteria for picture story books, and concluded that the criteria by which they can be judged are very much the same for all kinds--"a story for young children should be brief, containing few concepts and none that are beyond comprehension...if they are unfamiliar concepts, it should be written in a direct simple style, and it should have illustrations that complement and extend the text and are never in conflict with it" (p. 90). Unfortunately, as simple and direct as this criteria may be, would not be considered sufficient by Afrocentric authors, educators and critics of books for young children. These evaluators would be well aware of the historical reality of racism in the literary tradition in this country and the rest of the Western world which has caused serious psychological damage to many children who were not a part of the so-called mainstream culture.

In the mid-nineteen eighties early childhood education specialists Beryle Banfield and Geraldine Wilson co-authored an article to remind librarians, teachers, parents, and all those interested in the often harsh realities of this tradition for non-white children. They explained that "children's literature provides an almost unfailing gauge of the level of racism and sexism in a society" (Banfield and Wilson, 1985: 193). When this reality is combined with the additional harsh truths provided by graphic artist and poet Opal Moore, who explained in the same publication [MacCann and Woodard's The Black American in Books for Children, (1985)] the importance of the visual image in planting often indelible sensory messages in the minds of children; the necessity of maintaining vigilance over the books given to the very young child is even more clear. Moore also explained that while there is very little text in picture books, implied racist messages have historically been included in children's books offered as depictions of the black experience in America and throughout the African diaspora. Little had changed to alter this picture by the mid-nineteen eighties, according to Moore, however, like racism in other aspects of our lives, the negative aspects of imaging blacks and other minorities may be slipping underground. That is, the effects may seem less disturbing to the eye in today's books, but they are no less real and certainly no less potent.

Greenfield included picture books for the very young child in her collection of writings. Her books would never contain the "ingrained assumptions and accumulated racists images, consciously or unconsciously derived from the majority culture" (Moore, 1985: 184), which were commonly found in books by non-Afrocentric writers. In the early years of her career as a writer (1970's), Greenfield published six picture books for young children, Bubbles (1972), She Come Bringing Me That Little Baby Girl (1974), Me and Neesie (1975), First Pink Light (1976), Africa Dream (1977), and one written in conjunction with her mother, Lessie Jones Little, I Can do It by Myself (1978). The same themes of family love and support (#2), African and African American history and heritage (#1), black pride (#11 and #1), and values (#8), which she developed in her biographies and in her pre-teen novel Sister, which was named one of the New York Times Best Books of 1974, were also included in her picturebooks. Like her books for older children, Greenfield received praise and won awards for her picture books--Honey I Love and Other Poems (1978), Me and Neesie (1975), and She Come Bringing Me that Little Baby Girl (1974), were designated Notable Children's Books by the American Library Association; First Pink Light (1976) was selected a "Classroom Choice" by a joint committee of the International Reading Association and the Children's Book Council; and Africa Dream (1977) was the winner of the Coretta Scott King Award in 1978 [See Appendix A for complete listing of Coretta S. King Awards presented to African American authors and illustrators].

Her award winning book, She Come Bringing Me That Little Baby Girl (1974), was written for children in the primary grades (K through 3rd). It tells a lovely and familiar story that most young children, regardless of their racial background, will be able to relate. The narrative voice is that of young Kevin, perhaps five or six years old, who is having a very difficult time adjusting to the changes taking place in his life. The conflict is caused by the arrival of a new baby in the family. Sibling rivalry and jealousy are very common occurrences in families with young children that do not wish to share the attention of their parents with another little person. In this joyful account of family love, support and understanding, young Kevin feels a double betrayal because instead of the brother he was expecting, his Mama came home from the hospital "bringing me that little baby girl all wrapped up in a pink blanket." Greenfield takes her reader inside the mind of a child who is feeling threatened but unable to express the real problem: "It was making me sick to see them crowding around that ugly old baby and making stupid noises. And presents all over the place. It was really making me sick" [picturebook, no page Nos.].

The parents, relatives and other adults in the story are portrayed as warm, understanding people who quickly make Kevin feel as important as the new sister he will be needed to help care for. His acceptance of the new addition to the family is sealed when his Mama puts her one free arm around Kevin and tells him that at one time she used to be a baby girl, and her big brother (Uncle Roy) used to help take care of her. Kevin laughs at this thought and quickly runs off to bring his friends to see his "pretty" baby sister.

The story is a simple one which could have been written about _any_ loving family, but African American artist John Steptoe created rich, colorful and warm illustrations to portray a _black family_;

which immediately serves to validate the reality of the African American child who reads the book. This is extremely important according to another award winning children's author, Walter Dean Myers [whose books for older children will be discussed in the following chapter], who explained in a recent article that "children need books, in an out of school, that depict people who look like them because they are being told on a daily basis that these books are indicators of importance" (Myers, 1991b: 30). At the same time a book like this one helps to validate the reality of the African American child, it also lets children from other ethnic backgrounds view reality through a positive image of the black family.

While Greenfield dedicated She Come Bringing Me That Little Baby Girl to "all Black brothers and sisters who love and take care of each other;" she dedicated another one of her award winning books for young children (pre-school through 3rd grade) which strongly reflects the unique spirit or ethos of the black experience, Africa Dream (1977a), "with love to all children of African descent--may they find in their past the strength to shape their future" (no page Nos.). This is a beautiful book, perfectly illustrated in black and white pencil and charcoal-like drawings by African American artist Carole Bayard. It captures the the mythic, historical, and magical quality of the African cosmology (#8). A child is used as Greenfield's narrator to describe a special fantasy-dream which begins with a trip to "long-ago Africa." The reader and the child immediately become one with nature--ocean and land, animals and trees (#9). The small dreamer travels to exciting African cities and to an African marketplace. With poetic language, rich in metaphor and alliteration, the author's personal love of words is evident and serves to reconnect her to her own and to the dreamer's ancient African past--the classical African civilization of Egypt (#14). In the illustrations the large "old book with strange words" discovered by Greenfield's dream child contains letters from the ancient language of Egypt, Mdu Neter [called hieroglyphics by Eurocentrists]. The buildings in the dream are reminiscent of architecture in old Morocco and in ancient Zimbabwe. Riding through the desert on a donkey's back, the child sees the outlines of the famous pyramids at Giza, from the fourth Dynasty--Khufu, Menkaure, and Khafre. Before leaving the African dream, the child stops at a village where she is welcomed into the waiting arms of a "long ago grandaddy, with my daddy's face," who planted one seed that grew into ten tall trees with mangoes for the child. The family is once again an important central feature in Greenfield's story (#2), the child's source of love and nourishment; but in this fantasy trip, the ancestors have also been included in the family picture as they would be in the traditional African worldview (#8). Before departing, the dream-child experiences another important part of the African aesthetic--the dance and the drums--"I danced a hello dance to the drums of my uncles and sang a hello song in a circle with new-old friends." The circle, an important motif in the African worldview, contains all of the faces from the child's past and from her present (#4). To the Afrocologist, or student of African phenomena, Donna Richard's book on African spirituality, Let the Circle Be Unbroken (1989), comes to mind. It is very understandable why the Coretta Scott King Award was given to both the author and the illustrator of Africa Dream in

1978, for Carol Bayard and Eloise Greenfield have truly joined forces to "create black magic," which Sharon Bell Mathis has said is only possible when a black author and a black illustrator come together with love to create a book for black children (1992).

Africa Dream is a simple children's picture book with only 26 pages of text and pictures, but it was written and illustrated with such Afrocentric consciousness that it can be used [as I did recently in an elementary school in Philadelphia, PA] to introduce teachers to basic concepts of Afrocentric theory and methodology, even when their students would be too young to understand the deeper message found in the subtext. Some of these concepts are embedded within the same questions drawn from the pedagogical literature and used in this study to evaluate Black Literature for children and to develop instructional strategies for presenting it to children. The questions which can be answered positively include #1 (Does the author place Africa or African peoples at the center of her discourse?), which is apparent from the title and dedication of the book; #9 (Is the main characters depicted in harmony with nature?), which becomes clear in the illustration on the first page where the child appears to become part of the ocean and begins the journey and the dream to "Long-ago Africa;" this image continues on the next page with the child appearing to merge into the scenery with the animals, trees, mountains and grass; #3 (Does the theme celebrate aspects of African culture?), is evident throughout the entire story, from the African marketplace, to its dances, music, people, foods and rituals; #14 (Is Ancient Egypt presented as a classical reference point?), becomes clear as soon as the child holds an old book and "reads with magic eyes the strange words" from the Ancient Egyptian language, Mdu Neter; and rides a donkey past the pyramids; #2 (Is the black family presented in a positive manner?) is reinforced from the beginning to the end of the story, as the child recognizes and is welcomed by ancestors which appear with the features and face of a parent, and cousins who take the child's hand to walk her across the continent; and finally, #8 (Does the work help to address cosmological issues?) is answered affirmatively when the child's dream becomes a vehicle to reconnect her with her African past, her extended African Family, her lost African rituals, and her ever-present African spirituality which is represented literally and figuratively in the book by circles of family and love.

LATER WRITINGS AND POETRY FOR CHILDREN

Rudine Sims, professor of education and author of Shadow and Substance: Afro-American Experience in Contemporary Children's Fiction (1982), wrote a mid-eighties status report on children's books about blacks to examine what had happened since 1980, in contemporary fiction, historical fiction, folklore, and nonfiction books. She identified five African American authors who had emerged by 1979 as "image-makers who could be credited with creating whatever self-determined images of blacks that could be gained from fiction in the seventies" (Sims, 1985: 9). Eloise Greenfield was named as one of these five authors, along with Lucille Clifton, Virginia Hamilton, Sharon Bell Mathis, and Walter Dean Myers. Sims noted that Greenfield not only continued to publish books for children in the 80's, but generally maintained her same themes and emphases. The one new focus which could be found in her work was a focus on characters living with a physical handicap (i.e., Darlene, 1980, and Alesia, 1981). Although race is not an important factor in these books, the illustrations, speech, and other aspects of the black experience demonstrate that her work is still Afrocentric. Greenfield has merely provided a broader view of this reality, which in many ways is no different from other ethnic groups.

Although Greenfield's positive Africa-centered themes are basically the same in all of her writing, it has been in her poetry books for children that she captures the full ethos, or what Richards refers to as "the collective emotional substance" or spirit of African peoples (1989). Under the Sunday Tree (1988), a portrait of life in the Bahamas as revealed through a collection of Greenfield's poetry and paintings by Amos Ferguson, was one of the books discussed by Sharon Bell Mathis (1992) at the "Celebration of Black Writing" panel as an example of the "magic" which occurs when a loving black writer and a black illustrator come together to create a book for black children. This publication was Greenfield's eighteenth book, and one of a long list of titles written in celebration of black life. Using language rich in rhyme, rhythm, and music, which would be comfortable to a second or third grade child, Greenfield shared a child's vision of a special area of the African diaspora, the Caribbean Islands in general, and the Bahamas specifically. Her vision captured the rich ethos of the island's black community through her twenty poems of family, dreams, special places, people and nature. Lois Anderson highly praised Greenfield's style in a review for Horn Book--"There is a special contagious quality in Eloise Greenfield's poetry. Rhythmic vitality permeates the verses, and their musical texture gives a sense of place--the Bahamas" (Anderson, 1988: 796).

The questions drawn from Afrocentric paradigms identified in the post-sixties pedagogical literature which could be answered in the affirmative, and used as the basis of discussion and/or lesson development using this collection of poems are (#1) Does the author place Africa or African people at the center of his discourse? (#2) Is the black family presented in a positive manner, with community or group interest placed above individual needs? (#3) Does the theme celebrate African culture? (#4) Are components of the African aesthetic demonstrated in the work? (#8) Are cosmological issues addressed in the work? (#9) Is the major character or group in harmony with nature? and (#10) Is there a spiritual component in the book's theme? Each of these elements, as well as a sense of rhythm, music, and dramatic language, can be identified in the picture book Africa Dream. This is understandable when one realizes that Greenfield originally wrote the text of Africa Dream to be included in the poetry book, Honey, I Love: And Other Love Poems (1978). This is a collection of poetry for children grades 1 through 4, whose title poem had initially been written to be a picture book. Editors have been able to publish her writing in various formats, but the Afrocentric results have remained unchanged.

Honey, I Love: And Other Love Poems (1978) contains sixteen "love poems" spoken straight from the heart of a child. Once again

Greenfield's illustrators [in this case Diane and Leo Dillon] have infused a special life and spirit to the author's text to create "black magic." It is a book that can bring countless hours of pleasure to children who share its word-magic with family at home or in a school classroom. African American history is combined with rhyme, rhythm, and humor in the poem "Harriet Tubman":

> Harriet Tubman didn't take no stuff
> Wasn't scared of nothing neither
> Didn't come in this world to be no slave
> And wasn't going to stay one either
>
> "Farewell!" she sang to her friends one night
> She was mighty sad to leave 'em
> But she ran away that dark, hot night
> Ran looking for her freedom...
>
> She ran for her freedom nineteen times
> To save Black sisters and Brothers
> Harriet Tubman didn't take to stuff
> Wasn't scared of nothing neither
> Didn't come in this world to be no slave
> And didn't stay one either
>
> And didn't stay one either. (Greenfield, 1978)
> [Pages unnumbered]

Children can read silently or recite this poem, individually and in choral groups, copy it into notebooks to practice handwriting skills, create rhythms with instruments or body parts to accompany recitations, dramatize the action of the poem, use it as a model for creating original poems, and research the historic figure for whom it was named. There are almost no limits to the instructional possibilities--and all of these approaches or strategies will encourage the child to learn while having fun.

Greenfield has also said that one of her goals for writing is "to give children a love for the arts that will provoke creative thought and activity" (1975c). Because music is such an important aspect of black life, "Way Down in the Music," is another poem in this book which reaches out to a child, such as the African American child, who experiences music and dancing as an important part of his or her reality. This poem almost pushes the reader into movement--finger snapping, foot tapping, or simply swaying to the rhythm of the words. Other than the fact that the two musical groups mentioned in the poem would be dated by today's top ten standards [perhaps M.C. Hammer or The Boys would be more timely in 1992], many activities involving the whole child could be planned to bring the words of the poem to life.

Way Down In The Music

I get way down in the music
 Down inside the music
I let it wake me
                take me
Spin me around and make me
Uh-get down
Inside the sound of the Jackson Five
Into the tune of Earth, Wind and Fire
Down in the Bass where the beat comes from
Down in the horn and down in the drum

I get down
I get down

I get way down in the music
Down inside the music
I let it wake me
                take me
Spin me around and shake me

I get down, down
I get down
(Greenfield, 1978) [no page Nos.]

In this first collection of Greenfield's "love poems" for children, she attempted to fulfill her deepest goal of giving children "words to love...words that children will want to celebrate" (1975); and for the black child, words to help him or her love and celebrate themselves, their families, and their culture. She was successful, and this success should be shared with all children. Ten years after Honey, I Love was published, Greenfield published another collection of poems for children, Nathaniel Talking (1988). The book received the Coretta Scott King Award and was named an ALA Notable Children's Book in 1990. "Nathaniel B. Free" is the highly intuitive and sensitive nine year old boy who raps and rhymes about the different pieces which complete the puzzle of his young life. This book, like so many of the author's other award-winning publications, was illustrated by a talented African American artist with the skill and sensitivity to capture the love and respect the author infused in her words. Jan Spivey Gilchrist's black and white drawings vividly depict the world of this nine year old man-child; a world which encompasses his family, friends, life and death experiences, the past, the present and his dreams for the future. When Nathaniel is talking through Greenfield's poetry, young and old alike would do well to listen for he offers much food for thought. In one poem the child Nathaniel looks ahead to his future:

I See My Future

I see my future
clear as I don't know what
not all the things around me
not furniture or houses
or sidewalks and stuff
I just see me
my serious man-face
thinking
my laughing man face
my big Nathaniel me
moving through the world
doing good and unusual
things (p. 23)

Greenfield leaves the poem open-ended, so teachers will be able to have their students use their imaginations in discussing or writing about "the good and unusual things" that could be done in this world by a caring adult. In another poem she offers the reader [or listener] a glimpse at the evolving African continuum, which Asante (1987) posits is reflected in the poetry, rhythm and style of today's popular rappers. Through "Nathaniel's Rap," youngsters can be helped to understand that this idiom so popular in the African American community is simply another connection they have to a strong African heritage which survived in spite of many challenges.

Nathaniel's Rap

It's Nathaniel talking
and Nathaniel's me
I'm talking about
My philosophy
About the things I do
And the people I see
All told in the words
of Nathaniel B. Free

That's me
And I can rap
I can rap
I can rap, rap, rap
Till your earflaps flap
Till you go for a walk
I can run it on down
Till you get out of town
I can rap... (p. 2)

Nathaniel's rapping takes the familiar form of blues rhythms in a poem titled "My Daddy." While the boy tells the reader that his daddy "sings the blues and plays it on an old guitar," the actual blues structure is demonstrated by the author through the poetry's format. Greenfield also provides a lesson in the rear of the book which teaches the young reader the basic structure of a twelve bar blues poem. With this instruction teachers can help students write their own poems, while growing in awareness and appreciation of another aspect of African American culture (#3). The poetry in this recent book is one indication that Eloise Greenfield will continue working in the future to fulfill the personal goals she set seventeen years ago (1975c), when her career as a children's writer had just begun: "I want to reflect back to children and to reinforce the positive aspects of their lives... I want to be one of those who can choose and order words that children will want to celebrate..." (p. 626).

1991 was an extremely productive and successful year for this author who has dedicated the past twenty years to fulfilling her personal goals of creating books that would celebrate the lives and the cultural legacy of black children. In collaboration with African American Artist Jan Spivey Gilchrist, she wrote the text of a series of board books ["easy to wipe clean and non-toxic" and card board] for Black Butterfly Children's Books, for children one year old and up. I Make Music, My Doll, Keshia, Daddy and I ..., and Big Friend, Little Friend, are small books suitable for holding by tiny hands, colorfully illustrated with brown-faced children and adults who present familiar and inviting images to an African American child. Greenfield's texts, though brief and direct, capture the same warmth and spirt of the black family and community found in her biographies and other books for older children. Familiar themes such as the importance of music, family, community, caring and sharing are also recreated in these delightful little books.

In 1975, Greenfield expressed her desire to help children survive by understanding and dealing with the less positive, but still very real aspects of their lives when she wrote the following words:

> I want to present to children alternative methods for coping with the negative aspects of their lives and to inspire them to seek new ways of solving problems... to use their good times as stepping stones, as bridges, to get over the hard times... (p. 625)

Seventeen years have passed and Greenfield has also remained committed to her early desire to help children face the negatives in their lives by using the positive as "bridges or stepping stones" to move beyond them. To accomplish this goal, Greenfield included the harsh realities of drug dealers, unemployment, family separation, fear, and death that some children must face, in her more recent collections of poetry for children. All of these subjects were included in her 1991 publication which Jan Spivey Gilchrist illustrated--Night on Neighborhood Street. In poems such as "The Seller," where children turn their backs on drug dealers, and "Nerissa," where a little girl attempts to make her parents smile with a joke so they will not think about the father's unemployment; are balanced by poems which reflect the soul and spirit of black life, such as "In the Church," and "Buddy's Dream," where a little boy peacefully sleeps with happy images of himself "dancing on the tables, whirling on the floor, turning like a turbo, he's a terrible four."

Early in 1992, the recipients of the Coretta Scott King awards were announced during the American Library Association's annual conference, and Eloise Greenfield's Night on Neighbor Street, a collection of poetry for children (age 5 and up), published by Dial Books for Young Readers, received the Honor Book award.

CHAPTER 6

WALTER DEAN MYERS:
THREE DECADES OF
CELEBRATING BLACK CHILDREN

> I am a writer; I am a reader; I am a thinker; and I am a listener. Sometimes I hear things that disturb me. I hear now a whisper that is on the wind, and it says, "Despair the children." Voices rustling like dry leaves spread rumors that the children have somehow sinned, and the wind echoes, "Despair." Flapping night birds screech a song of drugs, and the wind echoes, "Despair." Despair is the song and the chorus; "Despair," people are saying, "for the children are gone."
>
> But the children are not gone, nor will they go, no matter how hard we try to push them beyond the age of consciousness or beyond the blurred age of caring vision. They will be here. And we must want them here. What I must do, What we all must do, is to resist the temptation to turn away from the children when they are troubled. We must not recognize the wholeness or wellness of a society that does not celebrate the children--all of its children. Let us celebrate the children... (Myers, 1990a: 46-47)

INTRODUCTION

Walter Dean Myers, commonly recognized as one of modern literature's premier authors of fiction for young black people, (Contemporary Authors, 1987), made these remarks on June 27, 1989, in his acceptance speech[1] to the American Library Association after receiving the 1989 Coretta Scott King Award. Myers was once again the recipient of the award given annually to an African

American author [and illustrator] for an outstanding contribution to the field of children's literature. Although his words reflect the author's deep concern and commitment to the advocacy of children; one would have to go back to 1969, when he was first recognized for writing an award-winning book for young children; and then assess his writings throughout his more than twenty year literary career to "locate," or determine his centrality in relation to African culture and African people. His impressive body of writings, which includes picture books, teen novels, for which he is best known, modern fairy tales, ghost stories, adventure sagas, interviews, book reviews and narrative critiques, would earn recognition for the predominantly Afrocentric approach he has taken in both the content and intent of his writing. A critique of several of Myers' books to determine which Afrocentric paradigms (Nos. 1-15) are reflected in each work, will also reveal many commonalties in the writings of Eloise Greenfield and Walter Dean Myers. This assessment will also reveal many differences in the two authors.

In 1985, when professor Rudine Sims wrote a guest essay for Children's Literature Review, and provided "A Mid-Eighties Status Report of Books about Blacks," she identified five authors who specialized in literature for younger readers that she classified as "major image-makers" of the 1970's (p. 9). Eloise Greenfield was one of the four females included in this list, and Walter Dean Myers was the only male. Sims confirmed that Myers had become known in the seventies for his urban fiction for teens, but she also acknowledged his growth as a writer and the fact that over the years he had expanded his writing to include historical fantasy (The

Legend of Tarik, 1981a), and mystery-thrillers (The Nicholas Factor, 1983) in the eighties. To fully appreciate the growth that had occurred in Myers writing, it would be necessary to go back much further in time than Professor Sims' report covered--back to Walter's childhood in New York City's Harlem district.

CLAIMING A LEGACY: MYERS BEGINS TO WRITE PROFESSIONALLY

Although he did not realize it until years later when he had already begun his successful career as a writer, Walter Dean Myers inherited his gift of storytelling from his father and grandfather.[2] Myers began writing poems and stories in his early teens and received awards and praise for his efforts in school, but his childhood was very different from Greenfield's. Whereas Eloise had been raised in Washington, DC, in a family which valued reading and writing as important components of their lives for several generations, Myers was born in 1937, into an impoverished family that lived in Martinsburg, West Virginia. His biological parents were unable to care for their son and were forced to allow him be adopted at age three by a couple named Herbert and Florence Dean, who moved to Harlem with the boy. Walter's new family was able to provide a simple home for him, but they were unable to nurture his budding literary talent. In spite of his success in school, Myers said in later years (CA interview, 1987) that in his home of blue collar laborers, the idea of writing stories and poems had never made much sense. His parents saw no future job possibilities in this activity, and were unable to bolster their son's ego or make him feel that his literary talent and success in writing in school was a valuable legacy.

Walter's childhood and young adult years witnessed several landmark events in African American History, which undoubtedly made an impact on his young mind. When he was seventeen years old and beginning a four year stint in the U.S. Army, the Supreme Court made its famous decision in the Brown v. Topeka Board of Education case which made the separate but equal doctrine invalid. The following year, when he was eighteen, the entire African American population was shaken by the kidnapping and lynching of Emmett Till, a 14 year old African American boy living in Mississippi. This same year, Mrs. Rosa Parks had refused to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery, Alabama bus, sparking the Civil Rights Movement. Following his years in the army, Myers returned to New York and began attending State College of the the City University of New York, and subsequently received a BA from Empire State College. His college years witnessed the escalation of his people's struggles for civil rights and the mobilization and political awakening of millions of African Americans which would eventually lead to demands for human rights and Black Power (Karenga, 1982).

Myers continued to write during all of these years, but never expected to see his work published outside of high school publications. In 1968, while working as an employment supervisor for the New York State Department of Labor, he submitted his manuscript in a competition sponsored by the *Council on Interracial Books for Children* and won first place. The following year, the Council published his first book, Where Does the Day Go? (1969). It was a picture book which tells a story of a multi-racial group of children who discuss their ideas about night and day while taking a walk with a wise and sensitive black father. Although this book for young children did not focus on the sensitive political or racial issues of the late 1960's[3], or the philosophy of the Black Power Movement as outlined by Stokely Carmichael a couple of years earlier; Myers' selection of an African American male as the sensitive father and adult role model for his multi-racial group of children, demonstrated that he was clearly adding a new Afrocentric slant to children's literature. The success of this book finally convinced Myers to take his interest in writing seriously; and in the next few years he published three additional picture books, The Dancers (1972), The Dragon Takes a Wife (1972a), and Fly, Jimmy, Fly, (1974).

In 1970, Myers accepted an editorial position with the Bobbs-Merrill publishing company and came to the shocking realization that he had been very naive in his approach to his writing and dreams of getting books published:

> I realized how foolish I had been in not learning, as a writer, that publishing is a business, not a cultural institution...Books are published for many reasons, the chief of which is profit. For so many years I had worked from the Bible School concept that if you try very hard and you're very good, these big hands will come down from the clouds, pat you in the rear end, and it will happen...In this country, to get published you really have to do something to compete for attention and to compete against television. If you're writing for young people, the competition is not so much other writers; it's the tube. (Myers, 1987b: 327)

He stayed in this position for seven years, and by the time he left the company he had acquired a reputation as a successful author of Afrocentric [by my definition] fiction for children, and learned his craft so well that he was be able to make his living primarily from his writing.

THE EARLY YEARS: BUILDING A REPUTATION AND A CAREER

Educator Robert Carlsen, author of Books and the Teenage Reader (1980), has explained that "although adolescent readers often want books that take them out of themselves and their lives, they also want books that speak to them of problems they are undergoing...they want to identify and empathize with characters like themselves and work through them to find a way out of their own problems" (p. 9). In 1975, Myers wrote a juvenile fiction book that would fulfill this desire for self-identification for African American adolescents growing up in this country's urban ghettos, such as the one Myers grew up in Harlem, New York. Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff, a fast-moving adventure tale written to appeal to the older child or pre-adolescent youth (grades 5 through 9), would also fulfill one of Myers' goals of helping poor black people understand that their world does exist, has validity, and significance. Poor urban neighborhoods may be viewed by outsiders merely as havens of crime, violence, and despair, but to the children and adults who live in these neighborhoods these blocks are their homes, which hold good as well as bad memories. The book was selected as an American Library Association Notable Book, and was immediately added to the purchase lists of school and public librarians across the country.

The narrator of the story is Stuff, a 12 and a half year old boy who is the new kid on the 116th Street block in New York City, and the baby of the group of young teens who soon become his closest friends. Through Stuff's eyes Myers presents this prize winning story for youth. In one early chapter, "The Funeral," (p. 28-34) the author immediately introduces several themes:

- death is a part of life that everyone living, including young children, must come to terms (#8); [Shortly after the story begins, sixteen year old Clyde and his sister must learn to accept their father's death.]
- not all black men or African American families are dysfunctional; [Before Clyde's father was killed in a job-related accident his wife had been a homemaker, he was a family man who enjoyed a glass of iced tea while watching television after work. He did not fit the usual stereotype of the unemployed, abusive, or absent black men whose families lived in Harlem; but was a church-going man with a wife and children who loved him very much. After his death, his family had to readjust and go on with their lives.]
- you can honor the memory of a deceased loved one by the way you live your life; [Sam tells Clyde that he can honor his father's memory by going to college and supporting his mom: "Ain't nothing else you can do except living like he was still alive and being cool to your mama" (p. 32).]

• college is not reserved for special people, but is for anyone who has the ability and the desire to learn;

• friends support friends when they are hurting;

• no one is an island unto themselves; [The African sense of community is reinforced] (#2):

> "Hey, Baby...you're my main man ain't you?"
> "We been tight since we been about this high, right?" He held his hand, palm down, about a foot above the floor.
> "Yea, Sam, I guess so."
> "Then you can't be letting yourself down, man, because you'll be letting me down, too. Dig?" (p.33)

• a man can cry--even in front of his friends (or hold hands): "Crying is feeling, baby, ain't nothing wrong with that at all. Are you hip?" (p. 34);

• there are all kinds of "smarts"--life smarts and book smarts; [Sam says he isn't as smart as Clyde, but through his words and actions, he demonstrates how very smart he really is.]

• it is not just **what** you do that always counts, but **how** you do it; i.e., "signification" or "signifying," an African/African American oral art which is appreciated by those who understand it[4]:

> Gloria had a way of putting people down but she never seemed to mean it. She used to signify a lot. And she was so good at it you didn't mind being put down, really. And she never picked on one person all the time. Not only that, Gloria would always ask about your parents or how you were doing in a way that really made you feel like she meant it... (p.39);

• in this society black males often come in conflict with the law, not for what they do, but who they are; [Twice the guys in the neighborhood find themselves in jail, although they have broken no laws.]

Myers does not directly introduce or explore the racist nature of American society through his dialogue, but he subtly injects within his plots examples of some of the very real, unjust, and often dangerous realities which have historically existed in this society, particularly for the black male. A parent or teacher who wishes to help African American youth prepare, both mentally and physically, for a harsh reality such as the unfairness of the legal system can discuss possible options that can be chosen if a situation occurs similar to the one in the story when the guys are arrested for a crime they did not commit [i.e., What should you do to save your life? What do you do to avoid potential problems? What should you do or not do, say or not say if you are confronted by law enforcement persons who seem to prejudge your guilt and treat you as if you have committed a crime when in fact, you are innocent? Why? Why not?].

In the 1990's, when the number of African American males incarcerated has been reported to be as high as 500,000, or 44 percent of the U.S. inmate population[5], the possibility for any black male seeing the inside of a police station, prison, or jail is quite high. An education for survival is extremely important for the black man-child in the United States. Walter Dean Myers' books for young readers (i.e., The Young Landlords (1979), Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff (1975) provide a non-threatening vehicle to broach this painful reality which exists in many areas of the country for young boys and girls in lower socio-economic groups. By exploring the incidents which occur to the youngsters in these stories, other youth can be helped to understand and be prepared to deal with a very unfair, but real social (and cultural?) problem. Adults and young adults who know the history of racism in America which led to the creation of negative, stereotyped black characters in the national literature and media [see Chapters 3 and 4], can also understand that one of the many manifestations of this tradition has been unfair assumptions and mistreatment of African American peoples, especially black males.

In the chapter titled "The Good People," the youngsters from the block--Sam, Clyde, Stuff, Angel, Maria, Gloria, and BB--decide to form a club which would become a support network of friends who have vowed to care for each other and be there when [not if] things go wrong in their individual lives. They are friends now, but they also want to create this formal "community club"--the 116th Street Good People. They agree that the name is corny, but decide that it does not matter. While having a rap session on the subject, one of the friends says, "I don't care if anyone else in the world thinks it's corny. If I get some people in my corner, some people who are going to care for me, I don't care what anyone else thinks" (p. 77). The others nod their agreement. What they are suggesting, without formally naming it as such, is to make their community or neighborhood an extended family that would be there for them when their blood families would not or could not. This is another reflection of an African and African American tradition of creating extended family and communal support systems as a cultural value and as a survival mechanism[6] (#2). Myers wants to let his young readers know that they have the potential to create the kind of existence in which they desire to live. They are not just objects that must accept what happens to them; but they are subjects who have the ability to make choices, to act, and to determine outcomes (#5).

- The importance of a good education is another theme that Myers infuses throughout the plot of this story. He introduces the social and economic problems which are compounded when an individual (especially a black male, i.e., Gloria's father) does not have a good education, and shows how this adversely impacts the entire family structure. When Gloria's father, who we are told does not read very well, loses his job because his company relocates to the South, he is unable to find another job, becomes defeated, turns to alcohol, takes his frustrations out on his wife, and eventually leaves his family. Gloria is crushed. She is torn between the love and the hate she feels simultaneously for her dad when she and her mother are forced to apply for welfare. The family's story may sound quite familiar to some readers, but Myers' reader is brought back to the additional reality that a proper education is one support system that was not available to this man, who seemed to have fallen into a cycle that carried him and his family to disaster. Myers' novel is a warning to youth to take their education seriously because their whole future, and that of their family can depend on it. There are some things in life, he seems to be saying, that we can not control [i.e., death, or a company relocating and employees losing their jobs], but there are other things that can be controlled, such as having the skills or training necessary to find another job.

In another subplot of the story where Myers makes education the main theme of his dialogue, the author's message is very similar to the position advocated by psychologist Howard Gardner, author of Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences (1983). Gardner believes in a theory of intelligence that challenges the traditional belief that most Western psychologists and educators have explicitly or implicitly been taught by living in a culture "with a strong but possibly circumscribed view of intelligence" (Ellison, 1984: 21). One of the seven types of intelligence which Gardner discusses in his book, "interpersonal," is the kind of intelligence that the sixteen year old basketball whiz, "Fast Sam," demonstrates when he attempts to help his friend Clyde adjust to his father's recent death without giving up on his own dream of going to college. While trying to bolster his friend's self-confidence, his faith in himself and his ability to succeed in spite of the odds, Sam disparages his own intellect and tells Clyde: "I don't have your smarts. You know that and I know that, or maybe I do and I just can't use them the way you do. But I'm proud of you" (p.31).

In spite of his words, the reader can see how intelligent Sam really is because he has the ability to find the right words to reach his friend and pull him out of his depression. Perhaps Sam is not a great Algebra student, or a great scientist, but his intellectual gifts are certainly as valuable and necessary in our society as other kinds of intelligence. A good teacher [or parent] could use this section of the book to help students assess their own personal intellectual strengths, and the possible careers [i.e., counseling, coaching, teaching, psychology, etc.] they may wish to pursue to be in a position to use these strengths. Knowledge of Gardner's theory and seven types of intelligence[7] would undoubtedly enhance the discussion.

The issues of teen sex, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases are also raised in this book through the character Chalky. Chalky is a visitor to the block who tells the guys who live there that he plans to ask Gloria for sex, and proceeds to show Sam, Clyde, Stuff, and Angel the condom he has in his wallet. The idea that sex is not just something boys do to girls, but something that males and females do to each other is clarified by the females in the group--Maria, Gloria, and BB They also help the boys to understand that sex is an important enough issue to think very seriously about before one acts. Important questions are raised and answered in this novel for young readers that may have questions of their own about sex, but are afraid to ask--i.e., yes, some girls do get pregnant the first time; yes, the female often must face the pressures of society's scorn, or the responsibility of an unplanned pregnancy and child rearing; and no, it [sex] is not more natural for a boy than a girl. Sexual questions and issues were obviously quite important for youngsters in 1975, when Myers' book was first published, but today in the early 1990's, the advent to aids, increase in teen pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in the African American community [and through out the country] has made the topic a life and death matter. This book would be very helpful for broaching these subjects with immature adolescents in a classroom setting or in the home. Another theme introduced in this book which is as timely today as it was in 1975, is that drugs can only lead to an early death, so leave them alone. The boy in this story, who incidentally is not a member of the "Good Guys" of 116th Street, Carnation Charlie, gets hooked on drugs and literally destroys his own life. The "Good Guys" try to help him, but he is unwilling to accept their help or help himself. The children in the story are saddened by the death, but they understand that it was almost inevitable. If it is true that among teens "reading is a social activity, not just a private one, and that young people read almost completely for experience" (Carlsen, 1980: 7-8), this book not only encourages youth to discuss the details of the story, but will provide a non-threatening way of gaining "experience" about drugs and sex.

- You don't always get what you want in life, but you should still go after it (i.e., Gloria and her dad), is another message found in this book. Myers appears to be telling youngsters that they should not give up their dreams because someone else does not believe in them--just try harder to make them become a reality (i.e., Clyde, who wants to go to college and has difficulties at first with the college track). Myers also shows that you can't _just_ dream [like Carnation Charlie], you also have to plan [or as Dr. King said, make "a blueprint"[8]], and work hard to make the dream a reality. Another important message that may be found in this story is that:

- One should not be too quick to judge a person's feelings based on his or her ability to talk about them. People who love you (especially parents) are not always able to tell you how they feel with words, or the right words [like Stuff's dad, or the mother in _Fallen Angels_], but you can still tell how a person feels by their actions; such as being there when you need them (i.e., the time the police come to the house to arrest Stuff. His dad hugged him and stayed by his side the entire time to make sure that the police did not use unnecessary force with his son).

Fast Sam, Cool Clyde and Stuff, as well as most of Myers' later books for young readers, supports the pedagogical literature which identifies the significance of relationships and "communalism" in the culture (#11) of African Americans (Boykin, 1986; Hale-Benson, 1985; and Irvine, 1990).[9] The characters in Myers' books support this position and demonstrate that caring and sharing, and being cared for during one year of a individual's life can stay with him or her for years to come. The year that is recounted by Stuff in this novel was one of the most significant ones in his life because of the friends he made and the very special support system they deliberately provided for one another. Myers recognized the importance of peer acceptance and approval to all teens and pre-teens--even more important than what parents think or feel (Carlsen, 1980), for this book, as evident in its selection by the American Library Association as a Notable Book, had wide appeal to teens in general, regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds. Juvenile literature editor Alleen Pace Nilsen (1975) praised the book in a review and described it is as "a warm (hopeful) story about Black kids in which Myers makes the readers so close to the characters that group identification is secondary" (p. 91).

The author also demonstrated his sensitivity to other aspects of black culture when aesthetic issues (#4), such as music, were raised in the book. The special significance of music in the black world reality--that it is an important part of life that has often helped to comfort and nurture the spirit--is demonstrated in the scenes where Stuff talks about his feelings when he plays his saxophone; and another time when Clyde is too upset to talk about his family problems, and the gang asks Stuff to play something for them as they gather together for mutual support on the roof of his building. Stuff plays for his friends and thinks the following thoughts:

> for some reason the music seemed to be more a part of me than it had ever been. It was like was pushing myself into the horn, what I felt and all, and having it come out still being me but being music at the same time...
> I played 'Mood Indigo,' the song I played the best, and it seemed to fill the spaces caused by everyone not talking. (p.105)

Two years after this book was published Myers repeated his formula for success in another juvenile fiction, Mojo and the Russians (1977). In this story a "gang" of winsome, urban preteens experience a suspenseful, humorous, adventure--"operation Brother Bad;" when they convince themselves that an international plot involving Russian spies is occurring right before their eyes, and they must save their friend Mr. Willie from becoming too involved with them. At the same time they are trying to work out this problem, they must also determine how to save their friend Dean from the wrath of Drucilla, an angry "Mojo lady," who he has accidentally run over with his bicycle. While Dean seriously seeks ways to appease the angry, and very scary old lady, Drusilla, and thereby prevent her from "splitting his tongue like a lizard," or making his "monkey ears fall off," (p. 2) his signifying friend Kwame is making matters worse with predictions of gloom and doom.

When Kitty's white friend Judy expresses a disbelief in the power of mojo, Kwame informs her that it is because she is white that she lacks knowledge about this subject. Myers again is very subtle when he introduces in a very indirect way through this dialogue the concepts of multi-culturalism, diverse ethnic folk traditions, beliefs, and cultural values. The author does not preach his particular point of view, but shows through the very positive interactions of the young people across racial lines that friendships do not have to be hampered by diversity, but in fact, cultural enrichment may very well occur. Judy learns that the power of mojo is nothing to fool around with when she accidently steps on Drucilla's floor drawings and becomes "paralyzed".

Myers also introduces the very real existence of racism in our culture in his references to Judy's parents' attitude about their daughter's association with a group of African American children; and through the reaction of the police when there is even a slight suggestion that this white girl may be in danger in an environment where young black boys are interacting with her on a very personal level. The fact that the characters are young children (preteens), and good friends, does not seem to matter in this inner city black neighborhood. Again Myers introduces the real danger or threat in this society to the safety of the African American male, in this case due to preconceived racist notions about black male sexuality and their possible interaction with the white females; but he does so in a very light and humorous scene. A younger child reading the book alone may not understand this underlying suggestion of racism if their personal experiences have not included this reality, but a teacher or adult family member could use this incident from the story to explore one of the serious problems the African American male in this society has had to face and overcome to survive.

Reminiscent of Charles Chestnut's conjure tales and Hurston's Southern folklore (#11 and #3), Myers weaves a delightful adventure story for the young and the young at heart. With humor, rich figurative language, and the rhyme, rhythm, rap and signification typical of young speakers of Ebonics [Black English], the children plot their strategy to catch Russian spies, and thwart a mysterious and dangerous Mojo lady. Myers celebrates various aspects of African American culture in this story, but it is through his figurative language that he is at his humorous best: "I'm so tired I could only wrap one lip around one of Joe Ferguson's choicest barbecued ribs" (p. 13); and "Having you for a friend is like having a bad case of poison ivy" (p. 14).

A few years after the highly praised books, Fast Sam, Cool Clyde and Stuff and Mojo and the Russians were published, Myers wrote another adventure story for juvenile readers or young adults, but this time with an older cast of characters--The Young Landlords, which was released in 1979, by Viking Press, and subsequently made into a movie. This book won the Coretta Scott King Award in 1980, and established Myers' reputation in the literary world as an accomplished author of juvenile fiction.

Paul Williams, three weeks older than his posse of sixteen year old friends, becomes the legal owner of "The Stratford Arms," when the previous absentee landlord surreptitiously sells him the run down tenement building for $1.00. Because he and his friends had formed a neighborhood organization (the "Action Group") to complain about the condition of this apartment building on their block. Paul, Dean, Gloria, Bubba, and Jeanie are the teenaged members of the self-named "Action Group." Unlike the stereotypical image of a "gang" of lazy, destructive, or self-absorbed teens, these young people want to do something constructive to make their neighborhood and community better. They start by protesting about a neglected eyesore, a beat up old tenement building ["The Joint," 356 122nd Street, otherwise known as the "Stratford Arms"]; and end by becoming young landlords, with myriad problems, insights and responsibilities that no one had anticipated.

While trying to help their friend, Chris who is falsely arrested for robbery, and at the same time attempting to make a profit from their run down building, the young landlords learn that life is much more complicated than it sometimes seems on the surface. In spite of the difficulties of dealing with a crazy, karate-chopping tenant who destroys the building right in front of their eyes and refuses to move out when evicted; a kind alcoholic who is hospitalized with pneumonia and unable to pay his rent regularly; and a variety of other poor tenants with equally disturbing problems; they never forget that people are more important than profit or business (#7). Even "crazy" people (i.e., Askia Ben Kenobi with his karate chops, Petey Darden making boot leg liquor in the basement, and Mrs. Brown, grieving for her friend Jack Johnson, who repeatedly dies at various times throughout the month) can do the right thing when necessary, especially when they feel cared about and a part of the group. The entire neighborhood pulls together to help the teens improve their community and save the homes of their tenants. Afrocentric paradigms, such as (#7), which focuses on axiological issues (values), and (#2), have plots which acknowledge behavior that places group needs over individual interests, may be discussed or written as an instructional strategy for this book.

In an article in the English Journal, educator and author Sylvia Enqdahl (1975) discussed the common traits of good teen novels. Quality novels, she contends, "do not preach, do not avoid controversial issues, and provide honest portrayals of reality" (p. 49). Based on this definition, The Young Landlords would qualify as a "quality" novel. With humor and subtlety the author portrays a view of black reality which recognizes that all life is not simple, good or fair in the nation's urban ghettos, but in spite of poverty and human travails, the positive and more important aspects of life--friendship, family, community, responsibility, caring and sharing--are still present there. Again Myers indirectly demonstrates the reality of life for many black males in this society. Through the experiences of his male characters, he shows why it has sometimes been necessary for African American males to endure unequal treatment from the police and the power structure to survive. Myers does not write openly about the ever-present racism in this society, but shows that in spite of the fact that none of the boys in the story are law breakers, they must face arrest, incarceration, and the presumption of guilt, as if they did not have the same rights guaranteed to all citizens in this country. The father of the main character and narrative voice in the story (Paul) seems to be very much aware of the dangers of being a black male in America (#11), and he wants to make sure that his son is not a victim of this unjust tradition. This father is not only present in the family's home, but he is also a positive force in the his son's life. In spite of the personal crosses he has had to bear throughout his life, he is determined to be a buffer for his son. Myers' fiction offers examples of African American men who are strong positive forces in their children's lives to counter the negative images too frequently offered as depictions of the black male in the Western literary tradition. [See Chapter 3, pp. 74-81]

Myers does not neglect the female point of view in his story. He infuses the traditional African value of sexual complementarity into his plot when the females in the "gang" demand and receive equal treatment and equal responsibilities for the upkeep of their building (#6). Subtlety and humor are the techniques the author uses again to leave his message for youth. Myers portrays a view of black life which was very different from traditional depictions of urban black life that had been painted by authors whose writing did not reflect love, understanding, or respect for this reality.

EARNING A LIVING AND EXPANDING THEMES IN THE 80's

In discussing the five African American writers she identified as "image-makers" of the seventies, [including Walter Dean Myers] in her mid-eighties status report on children's books about blacks, Sims explained that "in all likelihood, the fact that they are well-established authors has permitted them the freedom to explore new genres and topics while continuing to reflect the Afro-American experience from an insider's perspective" (1985: 10). Myers used his well-deserved literary freedom to depart from his usual urban-set stories to write a fantasy tale based on a real African hero, living in medieval Northern Africa, (The Legend of Tarik, 1981), and a mystery-thriller which involves a college student and a black government agent who work together on a case in an Amazon Jungle (The Nicholas Factor,1983). In an interview for Contemporary Authors (1987) Myers explained that his Tarik book was based on the true story of the Moorish general who led the Moors from North Africa to conquer Spain in 711. Because Myers was unable to find details of this African hero's exploits written in English, he could not write a non-fictional work. Even though his book is a fantasy, the accurate ethnicity of his hero and main character makes the work Afrocentric. Children can be taught through books such as this one that the black experience is much more expansive then the limited views provided in the past.

The same year that Tarik was released Myers published another urban teen novel which was applauded by the mainstream literary establishment. Hoops (1981), a juvenile fiction set in the familiar ghetto of Myers' childhood, Harlem, New York, was named a Best Book for Young Adults by the American Library Association. The book's main character is seventeen year old Lonnie Jackson, and like most teens living in his poor urban neighborhood, he has few illusions about relationships which last, and little hope of attaining a chance for some of the better things in life. With a special talent for basketball, Lonnie finds a way and the courage to reach out for his dreams of college and one day playing professional ball. Cal, a former professional basketball player in the NBA who gave into the corruption and pressures of the game and lost his chance to fulfill his own dreams of success, overcomes depression and alcoholism to work with Lonnie and his street basketball team so they will have a chance to be seen by college coaches and compete for scholarships. Myers believes that it is his responsibility as a Black writer to not only find himself, but "to use his abilities to fill a void by providing role models for children and adults with which they can identify" (1987b: 327). Through the unlikely hero Cal, this former basketball star who has fallen from grace, but manages to use his experiences to help a group a young boys, Myers provides such a role model. Some of the harsh realities of ghetto life and the sports world are revealed in this true to life account of a young man's struggles to find the right path in a corrupt and dangerous world.

Three years later Myers published The Outside Shot (1984). This book, which was the sequel to Hoops, was based on an original screen treatment by John Ballard, continues with Lonnie Jackson, who is about to leave his New York neighborhood for a small Midwestern college where he has won a scholarship to play basketball. Unfortunately, Lonnie must take with him the painful memories of his mentor's (Cal) murder, and the danger of associating with criminals who are a very real presence in basketball and other professional and college sports. Lonnie Jackson's environment expands when he leaves Harlem, and along with it he encounters new experiences, friendships, and problems. He realizes that he has to overcome many things to achieve his goals, but the bottom line does not change--values are always important (#7). You can not build something good and strong from something which is morally wrong or corrupt. Just as everything in life is not black or white, all of the people and situations he will have to experience in life will not be fair or just (i.e., his racist coach and some classmates), but this is all a part of the real world he must learn to negotiate if he is to achieve his dreams. As Lonnie learns more about himself, he is also able to explode various myths about other racial groups and about his own people (i.e., his roommates, Colin Young, a white boy from a small farming town in Illinois; Juice, an African American student from Gary, Indiana; and Sly, another African American basketball player from Detroit). Lonnie learns the importance of self-control, both on the basketball court and in life, the value of home, community, family (his mother), and about the opposite sex and the possibility of real friendship between males and females.

Sherry, a middle class African American student from the Midwest, becomes his friend and helps him to trust and open up to another human being who happens to be female, without a sexual basis. He learns the necessity for inter and intra-group support systems--sometimes you need to ask for and accept help from others. He learns that there are things worth fighting for to get ahead, but when you do succeed there is an obligation to reach out to help someone else. Through his association with Eddie Brignole, a young white boy he works with in his part time job at the physical therapy clinic, Lonnie and the reader learn that there are many people with problems in this world, and in most situations, there usually is no simple answer for them. By helping Eddie, Lonnie is able to discover some of his own strengths, and get some of the help he needs to accomplish his own goals (Eddie's mother June agrees to tutor Lonnie in math in exchange for his work with Eddie).

Like all of his other books for juveniles and teens, Myers uses humor to teach values (#7) and to demonstrate life's possibilities and realities. Through the "jellybean incident," when Lonnie and his roommates get trapped in a closed music store, Myers teaches the value of working together and using ingenuity to get out of a tough situation. This lesson is similar to a common theme found in traditional African American folktales when a weaker character (i.e., the rabbit, slave, or sharecropper) uses wit to outsmart the "man," or stronger character who possesses the power.[10] Through this humorous episode in Outside Shot, Myers introduces a style reminiscent of one of the oldest components of the black literary tradition--storytelling. Myers' theme is almost a direct carry over from the African animal tales which explored similar themes where the weak overcome handicaps to conquer the strong. This general theme from Myers' modern tale may be explored in a classroom discussion, or compared and contrasted with similar themes found in various genre within the African and African American literary tradition (#3).

One of the most Afrocentric components of this story is the role played by the "Brotherhood," an organization of African American males who are professionals in the sports world; and who want to protect young black brothers from being used and hurt through association with some of the criminal elements and corrupt figures in the game. When Lonnie realizes that he is in danger of losing his scholarship and a chance for a better life, the "Brotherhood" [like members of the traditional African family] comes to his aid, but only because they are convinced that he is not corrupt:

> If you clean, brother, and I mean squeaky clean, come on in that door. Don't lie to me and don't lie to the Brotherhood. Because if you lie to us, we're going to see that you get messed up because you're messing with the only thing we've got going for us and that's our integrity. You think about what you have done and haven't done. If you wrong, you just wrong, brother. Don't lie to the brotherhood. (p. 170)

In addition to axiological issues of goodness and rightness (#7), the African traditional value of working for the benefit of the group or community rather that the individual (#2) is another important theme in Outside Shot. This book emphasizes some of the basic themes developed by Myers in earlier books (i.e., things are not as simple as they seem, in unity there is strength, if you maintain your values and work hard you can overcome life's obstacles); but this book also offers opportunities for the more mature young reader to expand their black cultural and literary consciousness by exploring these themes and others more deeply. The broader the students' literary backgrounds, the more opportunities these books will provide for comparing and contrasting themes, styles, and literary techniques.

In 1984, Myers published another book which reflected a new direction in his writings for young adults. In Motown and Didi: A Love Story, he replaced his basketball and sports-oriented themes, and his gang/group adventure themes with a romantic inner city tale which focuses on young love, and on some of the more harsher pitfalls of life that youngsters sometimes have to learn to avoid--unemployment, homelessness, drugs, crime, and violence. Myers' new approach to his writings about urban life was equally as successful as some of his earlier works. This book was the 1985 winner of the acclaimed Coretta Scott King Award, which is given annually to an African American author by the Social Responsibilities Round Table of the American Library Association. [See Appendix A for list of all Coretta Scott King Award winning titles from 1970 to 1992.]

Didi lives in Harlem and wants very badly to finish high school and get a scholarship from a good college far away from her family problems in New York City. Her plans are jeopardized by her father's desertion of the family, her mother's mental illness, and her younger brother's worsening heroin addiction. Motown, a hard-working, strong, sensitive, and honest young man, who lives alone in an abandoned, rat-infested tenement building, rescues Didi from an attempted rape by two goons who work for the neighborhood pusher.

Against her better judgement, Didi allows herself to fall in love with Motown, who has already fallen in love with her, and helps him find and decorate a nice little apartment that he is able to afford. Although Motown does not go to school, he is an avid reader. This impresses Didi. Myers continued to instill the importance of education in his books.

Motown introduces Didi to his friend Professor, an elderly African American gentleman who owns a neighborhood bookstore and teaches Motown the value of learning about the history and culture of their people. Professor is a surrogate father and loves Motown like a son, but does not want to overstep his bounds with the young man who has already suffered the loss of his entire family and fears getting close to anyone, including Didi and Professor. In Professor, Myers has created a father/grandfather/elder character who wants very much to support a young man through the trials and tribulations of life that he must experience to reach manhood. It does not matter that he is not a blood relative. In spite of all of the negatives which exist in Didi and Motown's world, and there are many, there are still people in the community who will fill in for their missing and dysfunctional parents, and provide the necessary knowledge, encouragement, and support they need to overcome the negatives. There is also love in this community, male/female love, brother/sister love, and extended "family" love. Myers wants youth to trust their feelings, and not be afraid to give and take love from each other. Like most of his other books, this one ends on a happy note, with his characters achieving the victory (#13) which the author believes is always possible if his characters persevere.

In the years following the successful publication of Motown and Didi, Myers continued to change his approach to the urban teen novel. In 1987, he published Crystal, his first novel with a female protagonist who was not a member of a group of youngsters or teens interacting within his novel, but as his main character. He also focuses on another aspect of African American culture which he had not given much attention in previous books--(#10, spirituality).

The story begins in church, where Crystal, a lovely sixteen year old African American girl, sings in her church choir and has accidentally been discovered and encouraged to become a professional model. The words from a gospel song establish a foundation for the young girl's life, and at the same time, the author's developing plot. The song serves as an unspoken leit motif for the life choices and path Crystal Brown must eventually choose:

> "I heard him call my na-ame
> Early in the morning...
>
> Jee-sus called my na-ame
> Early in the morning...
>
> And I will follow Him." (pp. 3-4)

In spite of the money, glitter, attention, and other attractions of the fast lane she finds herself experiencing, Crystal keeps her head straight by maintaining a warm friendship with an elderly Black woman from her church--Sister Gibbs. Like the Professor in Motown and Didi, Sister Gibbs is a non-blood relative who substitutes for Crystal's parents when they are unable to give the girl what she needs. Crystal spends time helping and talking to her elderly friend, and receives love, good advice, and even protection in return. Sister Gibbs loves Crystal and treats her as if she were her own grandchild. She shares her faith freely with Crystal and encourages her young friend to follow the dictates of her "better self" (#7, values). One day sister Gibbs has a talk with the girl and explains her philosophy of life:

> "Me and the Lord got us a deal. I done spent my life serving Him and now I can walk the way I want to. I knew how to live my life though. You can't read the Bible and not know how to live your life."
>
> "Yes, ma'am."
>
> "You know how to live your life, Crystal," Sister Gibbs said.
>
> "I can tell by the way you carry yourself. You just keep on living like you know you supposed to. Don't let nobody turn you around, girl."
>
> "I surely won't." (p.30)

Even though the story takes place in a city, Dean introduces the ideas of living in harmony with nature and respecting all life forms (#9) in a scene where Sister Gibbs explains her rescue of a kitten from a store window. The kitten was saved from being swallowed alive by a snake for the sake of attracting customers to a pet shop. Crystal is given the little animal and immediately provides it a home, love, and protection. It is a warm friend waiting to welcome her from a rough day out in the "fast lane" where successful teen models and new movie stars must sometimes travel.

Through Crystal's childhood friend, Pat, the idea of peer pressure is subtly introduced into the plot. Both Pat and Crystal are church girls and know right from wrong, but they do not necessarily remember their Sunday school lessons when they move out of their home/church environment and into Crystal's modeling world. Crystal is constantly fed a warped set of values when her physical beauty, which people continue to tell her is not Black, is stressed above everything else in her real life. This includes her school work, her personal values, and her loyalty and friendship to Pat. Crystal puts her own interests ahead of Pat's, and expects Pat to forgo her personal beliefs to support Crystal's new reality.

Crystal's parents seem to have forgotten the important things in their own marriage--the love, caring and sharing--and are unable to provide the support that Crystal needs to deal with the outside pressure. Her mother's personal frustrations with her own life allow her to overlook too many of the things that can cause harm to her child. The father obviously loves his daughter and is there for Crystal, but he too is allowing other concerns (his wife's displeasure) to color his judgement. He does not see that Crystal needs his intervention. Once again the opening church scene leaves a subtle suggestion of another strength of traditional African American life and grounding for the plot; but this time it comes through the words of the pastor's sermon: "Let men walk in love with their wives and let parents walk in love with their children... Let us feel Your presence no matter how high we stand or how low..." (p. 4). Thanks to the "extended family" that is frequently present in traditional African American life through the church and non-blood related friends like Sister Gibbs, Crystal is not left without adult support and guidance. Sister Gibbs comes running when "her grandchild" tells her she is in trouble and needs help. Like Crystal, too many young people do not realize that sometimes when you accept too much of the "glitter" that life offers, in the long run you have to give up something in return that may be a lot more important--self respect, love, friendship, and family. Suggestive of the traditional African aesthetic which views the beautiful and good as synonymous (#7) (Asante, 1990: 11), Myers warns his readers that young people (and adults as well) must learn to look beyond the surface of things to find their real meaning or value. Because someone appears on the big screen and is advertised as a star, it does not mean that the real person inside the commercial image is not a sham. On the other hand, Myers also shows them through the plot of this novel that even a poem, when given freely from the heart, can weigh more than fame and fortune which come with strings attached. Fortunately, Crystal realizes this before it is too late. Unlike her new friend and fellow model Rowena, who has no one to reach out to and commits suicide when the realities of her lifestyle become too much to bear, Crystal has Sister Gibbs and all that this old church sister/elder represents in her life. Once again Myers provides a role model in the extended African American community for his protagonist who need additional support to make it through life. Although new approaches are added to his juvenile fiction, he remains firmly grounded in some aspect of the black experience.

Myers did not win the Coretta Scott King award for this book, but the following year (1988) he wrote another novel for young adults, Fallen Angels, which left his usual setting (Harlem) and traditional plots far behind, but was honored with this distinguished recognition. The main character and narrative voice of the novel is seventeen year old Richie Perry, who has just graduated from high school and enlists in the army in the summer of 1967. He wants to try to find some direction for his life, and spends a devastating year on active duty in Vietnam. In a few short weeks, Richie's greatest fear, losing a basketball game with his Harlem teammates, is replaced with the paralyzing fear and terror of losing his own life, and the lives of the other young men on whom he has quickly grown to depend, respect, and love.

Through his depiction of a variety of African American and European American characters, vivid dialogue and narration, Myers brings an important piece of recent American history to life for young readers. Occurring just a generation ago, the young men and women who really lived through this experience, and some who continue to live with it on a daily basis, could very well be the fathers, uncles, mothers, or neighbors of the teen readers of the nineteen nineties. All of the horrors and still unanswered questions of this tragic war are presented in Fallen Angels, but perhaps Myers' vivid depiction, told through the eyes of African American teenager, Richie Perry, will help to answer some of these important questions for this generation. Through Myers' fast-paced dialogue, many "words of wisdom" are offered in a didactic way to teens like Richie who are trying to find their way in life. The author demonstrates that he understands their reality: "Sometimes standing alone seemed to be the hardest thing in the world to do, even when being in the crowd meant you could be killed" (p.147).

In "Nam," Richie learns the real meaning of the words spoken earlier by his former English teacher, Mrs. Liebow, who had said-- "Not giving in is was what separated heros from humans (p. 36) ." A real hero in this novel is another young African American man in Richie's company named Jonhson. He is from Georgia, tall, very dark skinned, and stronger than three other men put together. Like John Henry or "Big John," the African American folk hero who used a hammer to drive steel and conquer all tasks put before him, Johnson the soldier is master of the M-60, a heavy-duty machine gun which he carries into battle. This is the "job" Johnson was not given an opportunity to perform in Georgia, but in spite of discrimination back home, he is determined to be an expert at what he does. At the same time he is sharp, dependable, brave, and strong, he is gentle and sensitive to the Vietnamese children living in the area of their base. He also will not allow anyone to use racial slurs in his presence. Certain words are fighting words to Johnson, for he will not be disrespected by anyone. He even accuses one of the white soldiers who calls the Vietnamese "Gooks," of sounding very much the same as when they call African Americans "Niggers." When the company goes into the field in search of the enemy, the rest of the men know that Johnson knows what to do and how to do it. If he tells the men to go to the right, that is the direction they will go, even if the Captain or Lieutenant tells them to go the opposite way. With or without stripes, Johnson is the hero in this company, and it is Johnson with whom Richie and the other young recruits feel most safe: "Maybe the squad had called in reinforcements. No way they overran Johnson. Johnson was the man. Johnson would kick some ass. Him and his sixty would sing" (p. 285).

Through the Johnson character, Myers gives today's youth a modern folk hero very similar to those from the past African American literary tradition. Once again [i.e., The Outside Shot] Myers blends the past into the present, thereby making stronger connections for today's African American youth who need to know their people have roots, as well as a strong literary tradition.

Like Motown in Motown and Didi, and Lonnie in Hoops and The Outside Shot, Richie learns the real meaning of love, for family and for friends, during this year of war when life and death appeared to be two sides of the same coin. He realizes how much he loves his mother and younger brother Kenny, who he continually worries about back home in Harlem. He also learns to love the friends he goes into battle with each day, and he is willing to put his life on the line for them:

> I had never been in love before. Maybe this was what it was like, the way I felt for Monaco [A sweet-faced Italian kid whose life Richie saves] and Peewee and Johnson and the rest of my squad. I hoped this was what it was like. (p. 301)

Peewee was Richie's "Ace-boon" friend. He was a high school drop out, a "bad" brother from the projects in Chicago. He is a colorful and likable character, with sharp street wisdom and a unique sense of humor; but like big Johnson, Peewee will challenge anyone who insults him, even if the person is twice his size. Richie thinks Peewee is a bit crazy when he first meets him on route to

Vietnam, but he learns to love, respect, and depend on him. Peewee (Henry Gates) is from Chicago, Johnson is from Georgia, and Richie is from New York, but they all shared the same reality of having struggled to survive in racist America. They each bring with them to Vietnam memories of home which include poverty and pain; but they also bring something with them which sustains them in this unreal and dangerous world of war and death--family, home, and their African American culture go with them into this strange land. When they dream they dream in black images, with a black reality, a black consciousness, and a black worldview (#11). Even the noise of a jet is reminiscent of sounds of black life and home to the young African American soldiers when Myers uses metaphorical language to describe Peewee's thoughts during a bombing raid:

> Sometimes, just after the gut-shaking boom of a jet, you could see the bombs arc down and, if the wind was right hear thunder and a symbol crash. Peewee said it sounded like a South Side jazz club when the brothers were right. A death blues for Mr. Cong. (p. 301)

Myers usually injects a spiritual component (#10) into his stories for young adults. This is also the case in Fallen Angels. Unable to pray when he first comes to Vietnam, Richie very quickly learns to talk to God and seek His comfort and protection, through the power of prayer:

> Lord, let us feel pity for Lieutenant Carroll, and sorrow for ourselves, and all the rest of the angel warriors that fall. Let us fear death, but let it not live within us. Protect us, Oh Lord, and be merciful unto us. Amen. (p. 128)

The same year Fallen Angels was published, Myers published another teen novel of urban life, Scorpions (1988b), but this time he was even more realistic in depicting the harsh realities that some children in America must endure (#11). Unlike the vast majority of his juvenile fiction, this book does not end with all the loose ends tied neatly together, with justice prevailing, and with victory obviously at hand. In many ways, the book is a sharp indictment against the cold and frightening world that adults have created but not tamed for the children, who have no choice other than to learn to survive its many pitfalls. Although the book was published three years ago, the conflicts that the main character, a 12 year old African American boy named Jamal, struggles with are as current, familiar and frightening as the most recent major newspaper and magazine headlines, and the featured topic of several popular television talk shows--**increasing teenage violence, guns and death**.[11]

Life in Harlem is very difficult for 12-year old Jamal: he has problems in school with peers and with uncaring, sometimes cruel teachers and administrators; his father has left the family to make it on their own, and his older brother Randy was the leader of a crack-selling gang of older teens (the Scorpions) before he was arrested and imprisoned for killing someone during a robbery. In spite of the love and support of his best friend Tito, a Puerto Rican classmate, his precocious, but annoying younger sister Sassy, and his mother, who depends on him more and more to be the man of the house; Jamal feels trapped, confused and alone. When his older brother sends his former warlord, Mack, to tell Jamal that he wants his little brother to take over the Scorpions for him, and help to raise his bail money by selling drugs, Jamal doesn't know what to do. He does not believe that the older gang members will listen to him and he reminds Mack that he is only twelve years old. Using Ebonics [Black English] and "street" language typical of today's inner city youth, Mack tells Jamal not to worry about his age because: "You be twenty-one with what I got for you. I got the heat karate can't beat. Miss three five seven and a ticket right to heaven" (p.44).

When Jamal realizes that Mack wants to give him a gun, a magnum 357, he doesn't know what to do. Unfortunately, although he knows that it is wrong, the youngster soon learns to like the feelings of power and control that carrying the deadly weapon appears to give him. Like the children and teens in schools across the nation today, Jamal takes the gun to school and uses it to frighten a class bully. Myers' child-protagonist is a likable young man who has too many adult-sized problems and decisions to make.

In one review of the this book, Judy Sasges (1988) explained her belief that Jamal's feelings of powerlessness, insecurity, and ambivalence will strike a chord with readers. The decisions he must make (should he run crack to earn money for Randy's appeal, should he take the gun to school, should he take the drugs the school nurse offers to calm him down) are all decisions that a growing number of young adults face every day. Unfortunately, the nonfictional headlines of the 1990's reveal that the tragedies which occur in the novel are also very real for many of our youth. The author gives a strong anti-gang message without the preaching which young adults quickly reject. Instead, he lets the members of the Scorpions, with their smart mouths and self-destructive ways, give vivid testimony to the dead-end reality of their lifestyle. Perhaps Myers' novel, which was named a Newbery Honor Book,[12] will help today's youth to make careful decisions before they take a life or sacrifice their own life before they have a chance to grow up. In any event, the author's approach was both realistic and Afrocentric. Like all of his earlier works, youth of any ethnic background will find the book interesting and helpful. In spite of a tragic conclusion, Myers ends the story on a note of hope--the friendship between Jamal and Tito appears to be strong enough to overcome the distance between Harlem and Puerto Rico when Tito leaves to recover from severe depression.

1988 was an extremely productive year for Walter Dean Myers. In addition to the two previously discussed novels for older teens, he also published a book for the younger juvenile reader, Me, Mop and the Moondance Kid (Grades 5 through 7). This work had a much lighter plot. It was described on the frontispiece of the Delacort Press hard back edition as a "warmhearted, funny story, full of fastballs, fast talk, and smart plays." The main characters are a group of preteen boys and girls who grew up together in New York City at the Dominican Academy, a home for orphans. It is also a baseball story which will appeal to both male and female little leaguers, since Myers once again reinforces his concerns for sexual parity (#6) by including a female coach and a little girl (Mop) who is a better catcher than all the boys. It is a fun to read story for children, whose main characters happen to be African American. At the end of the 1980's, Myers was successfully fulfilling his personal and professional goal of "using his abilities to fill a void...to talk about his own people, and to deliver images upon which [African American] children could build and expand their own worlds" (Myers, 1987b: 327).

CONTINUING AN AFROCENTRIC TRADITION IN THE 90'S

In 1990, Walter Dean Myers published The Mouse Rap, another adolescent fiction set in the inner city. Recognizing the decade long predominance of rap music and hip-hop culture in urban America, Myers captured this "soundtrack" in the words of his narrator, a Harlem teenager nicknamed Mouse. Like his fellow African centered children's author, Eloise Greenfield, who wrote Nathaniel Talking (1988a) for the even younger reader (ages 5 to 11), Myers chose to keep his literature culturally current by infusing this most recent evolution of African American linguistic style into his narration. Renown Afrocentrist, Molefi K. Asante has explained the cultural continuum and significance of rap in African American communities and in African American life:

> The contemporary black disc jockey, like the rap musicians and the deejay rockers of Jamaica, operate out of the same collective Afrocentric response to words. In the United States, the rap was preceded by *signifying*. The "signifying monkey," which is legendary in the African American communication memory, gives birth to several forms of signifying, to rapping... (Asante, 1987: 49)

During an eventful summer in Harlem, fourteen year old Mouse and his friends share several adventures, including falling in love, getting into and out of various fights, learning a new dance and performing in a competition, and searching for a treasure supposedly hidden in Harlem since the days of Al Capone. Mouse is a rapper and uses the rhymes and rhythms of his poetry to narrate the tale. The main character is loose, likable, and very much of the "now" generation. There are no drugs, gangs, or real violence in this story, and according to one reviewer, it is a book which "recalls the rap group De La Soul. Like that lovable album 'three feet high and rising,' the book is filled with a sweet good humor" (Kelly, 1990: 44). Perhaps Myers wrote this book to balance the ugly picture of his home town (Harlem) which was presented in Scorpions. No matter how rough life may be in the inner city, Myers needs to remind his readers that there are also many positive people and realities which can also be found there. He does not want his readers to see only the negatives, when there are so many positives that should not be overlooked.

Although he had not written picture books and stories for the primary grade child for several years, Myers wrote a book review in **American Visions** for parents and educators in 1991, which focused on this genre. His cogent evaluation of current titles for the youngest readers was a powerful testimony to the steadfastness of this author, his dedication to his craft, and to the celebration of the African American child, and all other children of color. In the introductory paragraphs of his review, he stressed the significance of books in the education of our children and reinforced his personal belief, and the belief of Afrocentric educators such as Janice Hale

Benson, Asa Hilliard, Beryle Banfield, and A. Wade Boykin [see Chapter 2, Literature Review] who have emphasized that:

> there are appallingly few books for black children. ...Children need books, in and out of school, that depict people who look like them, because they are being told on a daily basis that these books are indicators of importance...
> it is essential that we search for those images that nurture black children... by seeking and finding both the new books and the old ones that celebrate our children. (Myers, 1991b: 30)

Myers was happy to recommend books for young children which he believed to be "truly delightful." Aunt Flossie's Hats, by Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard, and richly illustrated by James Ransome, was highly recommended because it stresses African American history, traditions, and the black family. Jamal's Busy Day, written by Wade Hudson, and illustrated by George Ford, was also acknowledged for its celebration of the black family, and inclusion of positive black role models in the every day life of a black child. Clean Your Room, Harvey Moon!, written and illustrated by Pat Cummings, was recommended simply because it is a delightful book about a typical little boy [African American] who is happy and content in the world he calls home. At the Crossroads, written and illustrated by Rachel Isadora, is set in South Africa. It received Myers' nod of approval because it not only stresses family values, but it helps African American children to understand the reality and develop bonds with their brothers and sisters in the African diaspora.

This author who has written over thirty books for children and young adults, also warned American Vision (1991b: 30) readers of the continued existence of books that are not in the best interest of African American children. One such book, he contends, is Follow the Drinking Gourd, by Jeanette Winter. Although this book is supposedly drawn from African American folklore, and inspired by the song of the same name, it is not Afrocentric--it distorts the historical reality of African American people (#15), it marginalizes African people in their own story (#1 and #5), it places the fictional white character in a paternalistic heroic role (#12), and it depicts the African characters in a non-flattering manner (i.e., aesthetically uncharacteristic--#4). Myers explained that Winter, although she may have had good intentions, had told only a piece of history as she understood it. It is my contention that her Eurocentrism and lack of an African centrism, made her ineffective in capturing the true spirit, or ethos of the African American cultural and historical tradition.

For the older African American child, Myers recommended Kwanzaa, written by A. P. Porter and illustrated by Janice Lee Porter, for its family values and because the book celebrates an increasingly important aspect of African American life and tradition (#3). Children of Promise: African American Literature and Art for Young People , edited by Charles Sullivan (1991), was recommended for the richness of its varied contents and magnificent visual images; but at the same time the book was faulted because all of the art depicting black life was not done by black artists. The title is therefore misleading, and may confuse children unnecessarily. Finally, Great Women in the Struggle, edited by Toyomi Igus, was recommended because it celebrates the often overlooked African woman (#12).

Earlier this year (1992) Myers demonstrated why he was saluted by the American Vision editors (December 1991) as "one of black America's premier writers of children's fiction," when his most book for juvenile readers, Now Is Your Time! The African American Struggle for Freedom (1991) was selected the winner of the Coretta Scott King Award. Walter Dean Myers' contributions to the African American literary legacy, like those of Eloise Greenfield, had continued into the last decade of the 20th century. Hopefully, he will continue to write award-winning Afrocentric books for juvenile readers for many years to come.

NOTES

CHAPTER 6

[1] Myers' speech was subsequently adapted in published in The Horn Book Magazine, January/February, 1990, 46-47.

[2] In an interview with Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series (Vol. 20) Myers was asked where he had received his first writing lessons and learned his "sensitivity to the rhythms of language," (p. 327) and he explained that both his father and grandfather had been storytellers.

[3] The year the manuscript for this book was selected the winner of the contest sponsored by the *Council on Interracial Books for Children*, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. Riots resulted in African American communities across the country.

[4] See Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism (1988), New York: Oxford University Press, for a discussion of the African and African American vernacular tradition referred to as "signifying."

[5] See Howard Goodman's "U.S. Jail Rate Still Tops World," The Philadelphia Inquirer, February 11, 1992, p. A3. This reporter cites statistics provided by the *Sentencing Project* in a highly publicized study conducted in 1990.

[6] See Melvin N. Wilson's "Child Development in the Context of the Black Extended Family," *American Psychology*, February, 1989, 380-385.

[7] In addition to "interpersonal" intelligence, Gardner identifies in his book *Frames of Mind* (1983) the Western accepted "linguistic" and "logical-mathematical" intelligence, along with "spatial" intelligence, "musical" intelligence, "bodily-kinesthetic" intelligence, and "intrapersonal intelligence", which are more controversial.

[8] In 1966 Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. visited a middle school in Philadelphia, PA, Sayre Jr. High. He gave a speech to an assembly of seventh and eight grade boys and girls which stressed the necessity for having "a blueprint" for achieving one's goals in life. He also stressed the necessity for hard wark and taking pride in that work. This speech is available in the school district's video library.

[9] See Chapter 2, pp. 30-33 for a discussion of culturally relevant instructional strategies.

[10] See *The Book of Negro Folklore (1958)* by Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes, and *American Negro Folk Lore* (1968), by J. Mason Brewer for a good overview of this aspect of the black literary tradition.

[11] In the March 9, 1992 edition of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, African American editorialist Claude Lewis wrote a column titled "Teenagers Are Turning to Guns, Some of Them Just for Protection," (p. A11). He discusses the increasing national issue of teenage shootings, both in and around schools, and the deaths of youths and teens cought in the cross-fire. On March 27, 1992, a news article by

staff writer, Amy S. Rosenberg, titled "Gunfire on a Rooftop Ends Young Boy's Life," appeared on the front page of The Philadelphia Inquirer. Her story was an account of the death of a twelve year old Philadelphia student who was shot in the chest while he and a group of friends attempted to break into a store from its first floor roof. A few days later (April 1, 1992), another headline in the same newspaper announced the Federal response to the increased violence by and to youngsters--"Surge in Youth Violence being Met by Prison, Not Prevention" (p. A5).

[12] The Newbery Medal has been referred to as "the kiddie-lit" Pulitzer Prize presented by the American Library Association.

CHAPTER 7

BLACK LITERATURE FOR THE MATURE STUDENT AND INSTRUCTION IN UPPER SECONDARY GRADES

INTRODUCTION

In a recent interview of Houston Baker, Professor of English and Director of the Center for the Study of African American Literature and Culture at the University of Pennsylvania, which appeared in Black Issues in Higher Education, the present [and first African American] president of the Modern Language Association provided insights about the current status of instruction in higher education which are equally revealing for educators who work with secondary students in the upper grades (10th through 12th grades). Professor Baker first explained his contention that nothing is more important today in higher education in this country than altering curriculum in the study of literature and language to be more inclusive of the multicultural, racial, and sexual components of our society; he then shared his observation that the vast majority [95%] of African Americans who responded to a recent poll believe that "the Afrocentric movement is the most exciting moment in education... multi-culturalism is ok as long as Afrocentricity is a very strong part of that..." (Baker, 1992: 22).

If it is also true as G. Robert Carlsen, author of Books and the Teenage Reader (1980), has stated in the following quote:

> though adolescent readers often want books that take them out of themselves and their lives, they also want books that speak to them of problems they are undergoing...They want to identify and emphasize with characters like themselves and work through them to find a way out of their own problems...Adolescents want to discuss literature from an experiential standpoint. They want to find out what the writer is saying and what it means in today's world; (Carlsen, 1980: 9)

then educators of African American secondary students, like their colleagues in the lower grades, will be most effective if they include Afrocentric literature in their curricular offerings. To fulfill the mandates of Afrocentricity, which the African American community now considers a necessity for the most effective education of their children, this literature must be taught from the the student's own historical, cultural, psychological, and social **center** (Asante, 1987).

On the surface level, Carlsen's Books and the Teenage Reader (1980) appears to reflect improvements made in the nation's textbooks and educational agenda following the American social and cultural revolution caused by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 60's. In his bibliography titled "Significant Modern Literature," (pp. 139-146) African American literary masterpieces such as James Baldwin's Go Tell it on the Mountain, Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, and Richard Wright's Native Son, were included. Although very few of the books listed in his "significant" list were written by women, **none** were written by women of African ancestry. This lack of "sexual complementarity," which is a major component of the Afrocentric paradigm (Asante, 1990), is just one indication that Carlsen's so-called guide for teachers, librarians, and parents was not Afrocentric. His bibliography, "Collections of Modern Poetry and Individual Poets," (pp. 172-177) was sightly more inclusive and contained books by African American males and females such as Maya Angelou, Gwendolyn Brooks, Countee Cullen, Nikki Giovanni, Langston Hughes, June Jordan, and Dudley Randall; as well as Howard Sergeant's (1974) anthology of continental African writers, African Voices. Although many outstanding African American writers [as outlined in Chapters 3 and 4] were omitted from this bibliography, at least African American women were recognized as contributors to the broad tapestry of the world's literary tradition. Even though his suggested list of biographies is heavy with African American athletes, including Muhammad Ali, Arthur Ashe, Wilt Chamberlain, Walt Frazier, and Willie Mays, it also includes African American biographies of African American heros and "sheros" who held non-stereotypical roles in American society; including former Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, musical genius Duke Ellington, nineteenth century African American leader Frederick Douglass, wife of the slain civil rights leader, Coretta S. King, internationally renown author Langston Hughes, and the controversial African American freedom fighter Malcolm X, who was slain more than two decades ago, but has become an important folk hero to African American youth of the 1990's. Aside from the glaring exclusion of literature by black women on Carlsen's list of "Most Significant Modern Books," it would appear that this educator was at least moving in the right direction a decade ago (1980)--

toward the multi-cultural, sexual, and racial inclusion that enlightened educators of the 90's strongly advocate (Baker, 1992).

On the other hand, a more closer look at the recommended bibliographies for the teenage reader included in this revised second edition of Carlsen's book, shows that **real** multi-cultural inclusion was an impossibility because the author's foundation or starting reference point was Eurocentric. In this respect, Carlsen's reality was yet another reflection of the European-centered intellectual hegemony which has been in existence since 1500, when Europe first gained the political, economic, and military power to control the vast resources of the world (Keto, 1991). Carlsen made his intellectual reference point quite clear in the ninth chapter of his text, titled "The Classics." After providing the following definition for a classic text:

> a classic has not only ageless symbolism but a magnificence of structure that cannot be catalogued and dissected and yet produces an elusive, deep satisfaction. The choice of words, the ordering of details, the use of symbols, seem exactly right for the theme the writer is developing...There is no doubt that the classics represent man's finest use of language... (p. 149)

he included recommended bibliographies of books to represent four broad literary classifications--from the Ancient World, from English Literature, from American Literature, and from European Literature. The Ancient literature list included titles such as Aeschylus' Agamemnon, Homer's Illiad, Plato's Republic, and Sophocles' Antigone. Other than The Bible, all authors on this list were Greek, or well known for their interpretation of Greek history and literature [i.e., Edith Hamilton]. Apparently, from Carlsen's perspective, no other part of the "Ancient World," other than Greece, produced literature, secular or sacred, worthy of inclusion on list of defined as "classic." The fact, as Diop (1984 and 1987), Karenga (1984b), Carruthers (1986), and Bernal (1987) have all contended, that the Greeks often sought and found literary and spiritual inspiration from the writings and practices of Kemet or Egypt in Ancient Africa, is completely overlooked. Literary works by other non-European cultures are also ignored.

Carlsen's English literature list includes titles familiar to most American secondary and college students from print or film adaptations, and written as early as Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (1395), Sir Thomas Malory's Le Morte d' Arthur (1468), William Shakespeare's Complete Works of Shakespeare (1590-1613), and Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe (1720); and others written as recently as Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre (1874), Robert Lewis Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886) and John Galsworthy's The Forsythe Saga (1906-1921). Even though Edgar Allen Poe and Mark Twain are well known to have included racist characterizations and reinforced negative perspectives of African people in their fictional works[1], these authors continue to receive a place of honor in Carlsen's list of classics from American literature. Even though the books of non-English speaking Europeans such as Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard (1904), Dostoevski's The Brother's Karamazov (1880), Alexander Dumas' [an African by blood, but not culture] The Count of Monte Cristo (1844) and the Three Musketeers (1844), and

Flaubert's Madam Bovary (1856), were listed as classics "From European Literature;" not one book by an African American author, no matter how well received the work had been when it was written, or the overall impact the book made on American culture, was included in these recommended lists of classic books.

POST-SIXTIES CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

Apparently, Carlsen had not read or accepted the position offered nearly a decade earlier by African American author and literary scholar Darwin T. Turner (1971), who had co-authored a publication with Barbara Dodds Stanford for the National Council of Teachers of English and the National Center for Educational Research and Development, titled Theory and Practice in the Teaching of Literature by Afro-Americans. Quoted in the beginning of Chapter 3 (p. 70), Turner [and Stanford] had been commissioned by the Federal government to write this publication in an attempt to set the record straight, and "provide educators with recent research and information necessary to review existing curricula and plan new beginnings" (p. v, Foreword). In the theoretical portion of the book, Turner first explained how African American students had been damaged psychologically for many years from the systematic omission of their historical and cultural voice in the literature traditionally taught in American classrooms. He then made it clear that works by African Americans could be taught in literature classes simply because they met whatever requirements and justifications, literary or aesthetic, that were placed on other works selected for inclusion in secondary curriculums. In the eleventh grade, where a survey of American literature is frequently taught, Turner made the following case to prove his point:

> Phillis Wheatley, a teenaged slave poet in Boston, is sometimes praised as the best American neoclassical poet of the 18th century. The Appeal, by David Walker of New York, is as exciting a revolutionary document as anything written by the white militant Tom Paine and far more exciting than the documents and diaries of John Smith and William Bradford. Any course which includes the dialect verse of James Whitcomb Riley or the local color stories of Mark Twain and Bret Harte certainly can include the work of Paul Lawrence Dunbar, a freeborn son of slave parents, who was one of America's three most popular poets at the beginning of the twentieth century. The folk tales of Charles Chestnutt furnish intriguing counterpoint to the better-known "Uncle Remus" tales of Joel Chandler Harris. James Weldon Johnson's Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man (1912) compares favorably with the realistic novels of of William Dean Howells. Claude McKay's Home to Harlem (1928) vividly depicts the response of Black Americans to the jazz rhythms of the lost generation of Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald... Zora Neale Hurston's Moses, Man of the Mountain (1937) resembles, and perhaps surpasses, John Erskine's satires about Helen of Troy and Galahad, written in the same decade. Richard Wright's Uncle Tom's Children (1938) and Native Son (1940) are more powerful indictments of America than John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men or Erskine Caldwell's novels and stories...The list is seemingly endless. (Turner, 1971: 9)

By providing a list of commonalties found throughout the broad body of writings by Americans of African ancestry and the Euroamerican literary tradition, or by identifying for educators possibilities for equal or similar evaluative and instructional strategies, Turner was attempting to convince white American educators that it was possible for them to include the black literary experience in their lesson planning for secondary students, especially in integrated settings, without the burdens of re-education or modification of their traditional approachs to instruction. In other words, it was possible for white teachers and administrators to respond to the demands and criticism emanating from the African American community, due to the distortions and omissions of the black experience in the traditional American curriculum, and to do so for the most part with business as usual in their classrooms. Once again we had an African American who was recognized as an authority in his field[2], commissioned by the American Establishment [National Center for Educational and the National Council for Teachers of English] to help whites do the right thing, and be more inclusive in their selection, evaluation and instruction of literature.

The same year [1971] that Theory and Practice in the Teaching of Literature by Afro-Americans was printed and disseminated to educators throughout the country, several African Americans who had decided to break away from past practices of focusing on the needs or concerns of the white community, and to concentrate their creative energies on the liberation and survival of their own people, contributed their insights to another publication--The Black Aesthetic, edited by Addison Gayle, Jr. (1972). This was the first time a group of African Americans had attempted to formally outline the structure and define for themselves the unique Black Aesthetic which they believed should be the only acceptable guide for evaluating and teaching black writings. They agreed that this was necessary, as James T. Stewart (1968) had written a few years earlier in the revolutionary African American anthology Black Fire, edited by Leroi Jones [a.k.a. Amiri Baraka] and Larry Neal, "because the existing white paradigms or models did not correspond to the realities of the black experience or the 'negro' artist... and were even antithetical to his existence" (p. 3). At the heart of the Black Aesthetic and all of these apparent changes in the perspective of black artists, as explained by Addison Gayle, Jr. in the introduction of his publication, were in the interest of "speaking honestly, giving up the futile practice of speaking to whites... and focusing on the de-Americanization of black people" (Gayle, Jr., 1972: xxi).

In the historical overview of the African American literary tradition provided by Turner in Theory and Practice, he also included an explanation of what he termed "the new black arts movement, generated by frustration which had evolved in the U.S. since the mid-nineteen sixties" (p. 31). He cautioned teachers that this movement had to be viewed against the history of the past two decades and what some blacks perceived as the failures of the Civil Rights Movement; and he reminded teachers that regardless of the national attention given to this literature, it may not be effectively presented to an integrated class of secondary students as it was written to and for black people. Turner did not suggest, as he had for the older generations of African American writers, that the Black Arts Movement writers stylistically and thematically resembled their white contemporaries. In spite of Turner's advice and willingness to help white teachers painlessly integrate their curriculums, Carlsen's 1980 publication of Books and the Teenage

Reader was one indication that very little integration had actually taken place in the American literature classroom.

TRADITIONALIST CHALLENGES TO CURRICULUM OF INCLUSION

As well meaning curriculum leaders attempted in recent years to address the historical omissions and distortions of non-European male literature and history in higher education and elementary and secondary school curriculums, they faced many individuals who created various intellectual obstructions to block their efforts. Ronald S. Brandt, editor of Content of the Curriculum, the 1988 ASCD Yearbook of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, posited that these curriculum leaders were faced with "an unusually potent challenge to their credibility through publications which made strong cases for study of more classic literature and traditional history" (Brandt, 1988: 1-4). This challenge came from diverse education traditionalists including E. D. Hirsch, Jr., who wrote Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know (1987); Allan Bloom, author of The Closing of the American Mind (1987); and Diane Ravitch and Chester Finner, Jr., co-authors of What Do Our 17-Year Olds Know? A Report of the First National Assessment of History and Literature (1987).

Disagreeing with their overall positions and expressing regret for the hostility shown by Ravitch, Finn and other critics, Brandt explained his belief that the opinions of these capable, informed scholars which have been persuasively presented before the American public must not be disregarded, because they have made legitimate questions that must be answered by every generation.

Leading Afrocentric scholar Molefi K. Asante (1987) has offered general challenges to traditionalist scholars who call for a return to past instructional content and practices; and in particular, to Diane Ravitch who expressed her views on multiculturalism in American schools in an article for The American Scholar (Summer 1990). Asante analyzed Ravitch's arguments and identified her position as one which would continue the "miseducation" that Carter G. Woodson identified as the norm for African Americans more than a half a century ago: "...not multiculturalism at all, but rather a new form of Eurocentric hegemonism" (Asante, 1991b: 268). According to Asante, the past quarter of a century has witnessed a gradual break down in the era of white supremacy in the educational arena, and the various challenges to curriculum reform are an attempt to maintain white hegemony, Eurocentric paradigms and the overall domination of the structure of knowledge. For African peoples to survive in the twenty-first century, they must insist on the opportunity to view their reality, both past and present, from their own center.

RESCUING AND RECONSTRUCTING THE AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERARY TRADITION IN THE SECONDARY GRADES

In spite of various road blocks created by so-called educational traditionalists and conservatives to thwart efforts over the past two decades to revolutionize instruction in American classrooms from the primary grades through higher education, the struggle for change has remained constant, and there have continuously been leaders with "visions of a liberated future"[3] for African American youth. By accepting the validity and necessity for a more inclusive curriculum and varied instructional approaches, particularly for the African American student, {i.e., Afrocentricity and/or multiculturalism), numerous scholars and artists from the African American community have joined forces with educational change agents to help shape the direction of this change. One of these scholars is **Professor Eleanor Traylor**, currently the English Department Chair at Howard University. She recognized and spearheaded community-based educational programs to highlight the valuable contributions to the African American's ongoing struggle for artistic, political, psychological and educational liberation waged by **Larry Neal,** the late Philadelphia-born teacher, poet, playwright, editor and literary critic, who is recognized as a leading voice the Black Arts Movement of the 1960's. Through Traylor's efforts African American scholars, artists, and educators came from many corners of the world to Neal's hometown to participate in a cultural series, dedicated to the memory of their departed friend, fellow artist, and partner in struggle. To keep Larry Neal's message and his mission alive for future generations, they shared their memories, talents and thoughts with Philadelphia's educational, religious, political, and business communities.

In December, 1984, three years after his pre-mature death, Professor Traylor initiated the first phase of "The Larry Neal Native Son and Daughter Cultural Series," by coordinating a weekend Retreat/Institution for Elementary and Secondary Teachers from the

Philadelphia School District[4]. The theme of the weekend was "Afro-American Writers and Writing: Implications for the Elementary and Secondary Classroom." The major objective was to bring together teachers, writers, and scholars in the field of Afro-American literature and culture and other areas which the literature addresses to effect some pedagogical resolutions regarding the implications of African American life, history, and culture in the total education of all American youth. Some of the scholars and creative writers who were invited to share their perspectives with the teachers included John Henri Clarke, the "grandfather" of modern African American scholarship; Richard Long, former director of the Afro-American Studies Department at Atlanta University; Molefi K. Asante, head of the African American Studies Department at Temple University, and author of the landmark book Afrocentricity (1980); and other authors of children's and adult literature of various genre: Louise Meriwether, Toni Cade Bambara, Steven E. Henderson, Octavia Butler, Muriel Feelings, and Fletcher Robinson.

Several months after this very successful first retreat, a second leadership retreat was planned by Professor Traylor and her associates to honor Neal's work as a political activist. Just as Neal had followed the example of his personal hero, Malcolm X, and urged African Americans to determine their own economic, social, and spiritual well-being through concerted hard work in the area of institutional development, members of the Philadelphia clergy, business men and women, and community leaders were invited to participate in this retreat which had been given the theme, "Community and Culture: Issues and Strategies." In her outline of the program, Traylor explained that participants were encouraged to "consider the real issues which confront our communities and to consider strategies inherent in African American culture, whereby not only to survive the huge problems which confront us now--the decimation and intellectual devastation of our youth, the ignorance of African American cultural values and historical achievements caused by their exclusion from the curriculum agenda of major American institutions--but to triumph over them as our ancestors did."

In addition to Drama and Poetry Workshops which explored in considerable depth, with selected teachers, community members, and high school students, both folk and formal African American traditions used by many professionals in their exploration of these aesthetic areas; a "Writers in Performance" segment of the cultural series brought together thousands of community members of all ages to share the works of major African American literary voices. Some of these guest writers included Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Walker Alexander, James Baldwin, Amiri Baraka, Charles Fuller, Toni Cade Bambara, John A. Williams, Ernest Gains, Octavia Butler, Kristin Hunter, and Ann Petry. Each author shared with their audience excerpts from their most recent works in progress, as well as their earlier works, and sometimes the works of fellow writers whom they personally admired. Just as Larry Neal had envisioned and written some twenty years earlier, these visiting artists and members of the Philadelphia community were very much in touch with one another, as well as with their African and African

American ancestors who had provided models and inspiration for achieving victory/liberation through their printed words.

Amiri Baraka [a.k.a. LeRoi Jones], was one of the "Writers in Performance" participants. Years earlier he had founded the Black Arts Repertory Theater School in Harlem with Neal, and co-edited with him Black Fire (1966), the anthology of Afro-American writing which emerged in the 60's as the official introduction and voice of the movement. He remembered and paid tribute to his friend and colleague a couple of years later in a special issue of the African American literary journal Callaloo #23, dedicated to Neal's memory. His reflections of Neal and their earlier work together help to explain why so many renown African American writers, artists, and educators happily came to Philadelphia to participate in this cultural series dedicated to the life, work, and legacy of Larry Neal:

> I met Larry Neal when I was in New York as the Civil Rights Movement was turning into the Black Liberation Movement. That is, as the nonviolent struggle for democracy led by Dr. King was being superseded by the sector of the movement inspired by Malcolm X, who called for Self-Determination, Self-Respect, about Self-Defence...
> I found out Larry was an artist, a poet, and writer after our mutually expressed commitment to destroy white supremacy...
> We wanted an art that would actually reflect black life and its history and legacy of resistance and struggle! We wanted an art that was as black as our music. A blues poetry...A jazz poetry, a funky verse full of exploding anti-racist weapons. A bebop and new music poetry, that would scream and taunt and rhythm...
> An art that would educate and unify black people...
> Larry was an innovator in this regard. He was a spiritual leader of that movement. One of the hot lipped hip bebop

> poetry warriors trying to take the language some place else. Just as Jesse is trying to take the place into space today!... (Baraka, 1985: 248-259).

The segment of the cultural series which was most significant in beginning to institutionalize Larry Neal's legacy for African American youth in the upper secondary grades, was the "Classics in Afro-American (Great Books) Seminar Series." For three years teachers and administrators from the Philadelphia School District met bi-monthly with two master teachers to explore the instructional possibilities for selected "classic" books which represented African American autobiography, fiction, and the essay. Professor Eleanor Traylor, the series coordinator, invited Houston Baker, Greenfield Professor in the English Department at the University of Pennsylvania, to join her in leading the educators through their explorations of the achievements of African American people in literature.

The books chosen for each session of the three-part series were identified by the master teachers as "Classics" and "Great Books" because "they are the great celebrations of African American life, and they each constitute the space in which it moves" [see note #4 for sources for direct quotes in this section]. In doing so, Professors Traylor and Baker contended, the work transmits the main currents of African American social, economic, and intellectual traditions from the Nineteenth century to the present [essays]; reflects a certain rhythmic motion or progression [similar to that in a jazz jam session] of the individual and collective experience of African peoples in the diaspora--confrontation, improvisation/adaptation, affirmation, and celebration [autobiography]; or signals some major emphasis [style, point of view, signification] in the continuing production of the African American novel [fiction]. In any event, the works can be perceived as "gifts of the African American spirit" when properly explored. The definition for "Classics" and "Great Books" provided by these African American scholars were culturally and racially specific, and were unquestionably Afrocentric. Unlike the definition provided by Carlsen, there was no attempt to make broad statements about literature in general, while providing examples from just one culture and racial group (European/Greek). Although Afrocentric, Traylor and Baker's definitions were not hegemonic, and they never implied or suggested that the literature of other cultural groups was not as worthy. [For bibliographies of all texts included in the three part "Classics" in Afro-American Literature (Great Books) Seminar Series see Appendix E.]

Similar strategies which were used to explore selected texts with the teachers who participated in the three eight-week sessions of the Larry Neal Classics Seminar could also be used by high school English teachers with "mature readers" in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades. In addition to general literary and critical examinations, secondary teachers could also examine unique aspects of the African American cultural experience which became infused with the literary tradition which evolved from the African oral tradition. For example, Professor Baker explored with the seminar participants concepts which he had written a few years earlier in a book titled The Journey Back: Issues in Black Literature and Criticism (1980).

In this earlier text Baker had demonstrated how "the literary texts of Black America provide clear evidence that blacks have attempted to order the disruption and chaos occasioned by their confrontation with the West through language" (p. 167). He and Professor Traylor also explored this unique aspect of the African American literary tradition with the seminar participants through discussions of the jazz and blues traditions which evolved from African music patterns and became models in the African American literary experience. This approach to the texts would provide an equally meaningful instructional strategy for teens and young adults of the 1990's, who frequently must learn to grapple with the confusing and chaotic realities of their life and times. Teachers and students could use Baker's Blues Ideology and Afro-American Literature (1984) as a reference for explorations of recent critical theory which could be included in the analysis of specific texts. Observations such as the following made by Traylor in "Music as Theme: The Jazz Mode in the Works of Toni Cade Bambara," and "The Blues Mode in the Works of Margaret Walker," chapters she contributed to Mari Evan's (1984) Black Women Writers (1950-1980), could also be incorporated in the lesson prepared for older secondary students:

> the oracular, evocative, incantatory, elliptical songs of African American oral literature form a traditional reference which may be called the blues mode of Afro-American narrative and fiction, and the fact that these songs have served Afro-American narrators and novelists as ancestral touchstone (Traylor, 1984: 513).

The historical, social and cultural commonalties found in the African American art forms jazz and blues, and rap, currently the most popular mode of cultural expression exploding world-wide from the hip-hop generation of youths in urban America[5], could add an even more exciting and motivating strategy to a high school teacher's instructional approach. By tapping into an existing interest area of their students, the teacher would be able to easily motivate and expand this initial foundation with information and details which might otherwise be beyond the students' experiential or intellectual grasp. Students are more likely to apply themselves if they have a strong interest in the subject, and perceive the topic as relevant and meaningful to them.

Using an instructional approach similar to the following one used with the adult teachers in the Larry Neal Seminar in African American Classics, the high school teacher will be able to use the same Afrocentric paradigms, [Nos. 1-15, listed with references] identified in the pedagogical literature reviewed in Chapter 2, to guide their students' exploration of a particular text.

THE LARRY NEAL CLASSICS IN AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH

The methods of approach used by the master teachers (Dr. Eleanor Traylor and Dr. Houston Baker) for the seminar were trifold: historical, analytical and comparative. The main objectives of the three-part series were to provide participants with bibliographical knowledge of African American literature of three genres, an historical contextual knowledge of the works, and a method of analytical approach for each book. The following six questions and some possibilities for their answers were used as the basis of discussion and analysis for each book in the series:

A. For Autobiographies and Fiction

1. The Question of Character

   Who is the narrator or central character of the work? (The answer to the question should encompass as many vantage points as possible: psychological, spiritual [#10], historical [#15], intellectual.)

2. The Question of Setting

   Where is the narrator or central character? (The answer to the question derives from as many vantage points as one may see: geographical (When Africa is the setting is there a classical reference--Kemet [#14], historical, psychic [#8], or spiritual ? [#10])

3. The Question of Point of View

   What is the narrator's or central characters' relation to other character or to his or her setting? (Withdrawn? Involved? Cynical? Committed-to whom or what? What values or axiological issues, if any, are reinforced in the text? [#7])

4. The Question of Plot

   In what action is the narrator or central character engaged? (actually or symbolically) What is the essential experience of the narrator or central character? (What is the effect of experience upon the narrator or central character?)

5. The Question of Theme

What does the narrator ask the reader to witness? (Upon what or whom does his or her description focus? What details are called to the attention of the reader by incidental or frequent mention? What are the narrator's or central character's attitudes? To whom or what is the narrator sympathetic or antagonistic?)

6. The Question of Style

What are the means by which the work is delivered to the reader? (May instances of elaborate language or Ebonics [Black English] [#11, #4, and #3] be identified in the work?)

B. For Essays

1. Who is the audience? (Nationally, historically? [#15])
2. What is the purpose? (Within the work; within its historical context--is the presentation honest and historically accurate? [#15])
3. Who is the speaker/writer (Psychologically, spiritually, intellectually, historically?) Where is this individual **located** in terms of their "Africanness?" [#1]
4. What is the central idea? (Is Africa at the **center** of the discourse? [#1] Is there a spiritual component to the work? [#10]

5. What are the details offered in support of the position taken or the point-of-view advanced?

6. What is the method of development of the text? (Is the African aesthetic [#4] or culture [#3] reflected in this method?

REASSESSING AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE THROUGH AN AFROCENTRIC PARADIGM[6]

More than twenty-five years have passed since Stokely Carmichael challenged all thinking African Americans to join the members of SNCC in their quest for Black Power and for the cultural and psychological liberation of African peoples in the diaspora. Leading members of the Black Arts Movements, such as Larry Neal, answered this call and joined forces with their fellow artists to begin the ongoing task of providing "visions of a liberated future" for the following generations by resurrecting and reconstructing their often ignored or misunderstood African American literary tradition. When this task is finally completed, African American youth and adults alike will be better able to use their literary legacy to understand the past and present struggles of their people, and to negotiate the direction of their future. In spite of [or because of] the current educational status of the African American child [see literature review in chapter 2], and the perceived miseducation of the majority of these children, the broad African American community, as reiterated by Baker (1992), has turned to

Afrocentrity as a vehicle for "saving their children." In the upper high school grades, the inclusion of African American literature previously omitted from the traditional high school curriculum is one step in the right direction, but processing this literature through an Afrocentric paradigm is also necessary if "the advocates of 'cultural literacy' such as E. D. Hirsch (1987), who seem set on centering the curriculum on what one student called 'dead white guys' (Tchudi, 1991: 98)," are not to be successful in their attempts to maintain the status quo.

Each of the books included in the bibliographies for the Larry Neal Classics in African American Literature Seminar [listed in Appendix E] is a product of an individual author's personal and artistic vision, conditioned by the social, political, and economic realities of his or her times. These books, having withstood the test of time and been assessed by many scholars as landmark works in the black literary tradition, may be also viewed through an "Afrocentric lens," and included in any American or African American literature course for mature secondary students (grades 10-12). Using an Afrocentric critical approach, the following instructional strategies provided for two of the authors and publications included in the bibliographies for the Larry Neal Afro-American Classics Seminar--The Fire Next Time (1964), by James Baldwin, and Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937), by Zora Neale Hurston--will demonstrate how literary legacies left by African American writers may be used as educational vehicles for helping African American youths and young adults of the 1990's understand the African American literary tradition. Hopefully, students will also better understand the present by recognizing their individual and collective place on the cultural and historical continuum represented by these authors and their landmark publications. These literary assessments of Hurston's fictional masterpiece, Their Eyes Were Watching God, and Baldwin's incendiary and polemical essay, The Fire Next Time, will additionally reveal some of the survival techniques which were used successfully by African Americans from past generations, and which may be useful in the present and the future. The Afrocentric critical approach or method, according to Molefi K. Asante, "pursues a world voice distinctly **African**-centered in relationship to to external phenomena... the enterprise is framed by cosmological, epistemological, axiological, and aesthetic issues" (Asante, 1990: 8).

ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD

To "locate" Hurston when she wrote Their Eyes Were Watching God in 1937, and was identified as one of the most prolific literary voices to emerge from the Harlem Renaissance, one would have to go back to the turn of the century, to the rural South, and to Eatonville, Florida. It was here in this all-black town in the heart of Dixie that Zora was born and began to form the cosmology, or world view, which would later frame her creative expression. While other African Americans living in the South were struggling for survival in the face of physical, economic and mental repression, as well as the loss of most of the rights obtained after the Civil War, Zora's childhood struggles had been very different, and much more personal.

one of eight children, a bright, high-spirited girl, the daughter of a sharecropper and "jack-leg" preacher. She struggled to find meaning in her life in the poor, rural, all-black village of her birth, where young ladies were supposed to be much less opinionated and less precocious than her own personality dictated.

Even though she lost the most important person in her life, her mother, at a very early age, she was determined to get an education and find that place in the sun that her mother had convinced her she would one day have. Zora was certain that this would be her destiny. It is quite possible that her drive to find her true self had come from somewhere deep within her African ancestral heritage, from a place and time when black women walked side by side with their men, ruled empires and led armies into battle [#6 and #14]. This was part of her distant cultural heritage that she never learned in her school lessons, or in her family's modest home, but somehow sensed anyway. She grew up with loving memories of her people's religious fervor, their colorful stories, customs, music, and dramatic expression [#4]. When she left the South to follow her dreams for an education and a new life, she took Eatonville with her, in heart and memory. She would eventually recreate the black world of her childhood in the unique pageantry of her folklore [#3].

The "renaissance" of the 1920's, that drew Zora Hurston from Eatonville, Florida, to Harlem, New York, and to its world of optimism, intellectualism, and cultural elitism, was exploding in the same city within a city that Baldwin would later view from cramped tenements, typified by crime, violence and poverty (Huggins, 1971). Hurston's fifth major publication, and what has been called her best novel, was written just twelve years after she arrived in New York City's black Mecca to begin her very successful literary career. Her success in writing was as broad as the various travels she undertook to gain experience as an anthropologist and to document the folkways of her people:

> From 1925, when she first arrived in New York. 'like a far-flung watermelon' to capture the illustrious Opportunity Magazine literary awards in the short story and play categories, to 1948, when she dropped a stitch and let slip her 4th novel ...Zora produced over a dozen published stories, 2 original musicals, 1 libretto for a folk opera, several articles on voodoo, several on language and lore, 2 major collections of African American folklore (tales, raps, stories, songs, jokes, riddles, recipes, remedies, and other wisdoms), 4 novels and one autobiography. She'd traveled throughout the South, the Caribbean, Hollywood, Honduras...collected, lectured, won accolades, got talked about, was plagiarized, and went right on stepping...
> (Bambara, 1981: iii)

Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937) is an excellent novel for both adult and the adolescent readers. It provides teachers of African American literature myriad instructional avenues for reaching teenage youth of the 1990's. The major themes of the book, feminism and black self-determinism, popular in the pre-Civil Rights era when the book was written, continue to be important issues impacting today's youths. Hurston's development of the folkloric themes and motifs she had become familiar with during her childhood in Eatonville, provides the richest vehicles for reconnecting African Americans with their rich cultural heritage [#3]--a heritage which was rooted in African soil and flowered in spite of many oppressive forces in its new world reality [#13-Victorious Consciousness].

Their Eyes Were Watching God is Janie Crawford's personal story and "journey to autonomy and spiritual liberation that is told to her friend Pheoby in the form of a reminiscence...Janie is the tale-teller and her story is a consciously artistic act, one in which she imposes order and meaning on the material of her life" [#8] (Crabtree, 1985: 55). Hurston's technique of using a story within a story is at once a reflection of a major motif in the African aesthetic--circularity [#4], and at the same time, a recreation of the African and African American folk tradition of storytelling itself. Just as Hurston had begun her own life's journey in a small, rural southern town before going out into the world to get an education and find herself, and then returned as a young anthropologist to study and collect the rich black traditions of her former life; the life of her main character, Janie Crawford, follows a similar circular developmental pattern.

The very complex story which Janie unravels for Pheoby, begins with the abrupt ending of Janie's childhood when the girl entered adolescence and sexual curiosity and romantic musings became part of her reality. Her grandmother's overwhelming fear that the girl would be misused by men, just as she had been misused by her master during slavery, and as Janie's own mother, her daughter, had been misused during the years immediately following

Emancipation, directed the older woman to force her granddaughter into a loveless sham of a marriage with Logan Killicks. This episode will provide a forum for classroom discussions of the historical and present existence of physical and sexual abuse of children and young adults in our society. Students may be able to gain insights from the text and their evaluations of the fiction that could be useful in avoiding these occurrences in their real lives. Through the character of Janie's grandmother, Hurston was able to present the rich poetic imagery of her folk speech [#3] beside the misguided African American worldview [#11] that too frequently doomed the black female to an untenable "Catch twenty-two" reality:

> Honey, de white man is the ruler of everything as avar as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it's some place way off in de oceon where de black man is in power, but we don't know nothin' but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell the nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his women-folks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so far as Ah can see. Ah been prayin' fuh it tah be different wid you. Lawd, Lawd. Lawd! (p. 29)

Even though she refused to admit it for nearly a quarter of a century, Janie hated her grandmother who unwittingly had "taken the biggest thing God had made, the horizon-- and pinched it into such a little bit of a thing that she could tie about her grand-daughter's neck tight enough to choke her" (p. 29). Refusing to become Logan Killicks' "mule," Janie jumped at the first opportunity to escape by running off with the handsome and ambitious Joe Starks. She felt certain that her second marriage to the man who was destined to become the first mayor of Eatonville, Florida, would bring her the love and happiness every young woman needed to fill her horizon. She learned very quickly that Starks had his own ideas of where a woman's place should be, and this was as much on a shelf, as her grandmother's vision would have placed her in a cage. To Joe Starks, who became the leading citizen in Eatonville, but with white inspired values [rejecting his own community and valuing money more than relationships], Janie was reduced to an attractive ornament to reflect her husband's accomplishments and sense of self-importance. Janie's situation is not unlike that of many young women of this generation who have been made to believe that they will only become as important in life as the man that marries them or shares their life. The importance of self-esteem is apparent in this story and the topic could be explored in the classroom. Unhappily, Janie surrenders to this subservient role and spends the next twenty years of her life on the outside looking into the highly colorful and dramatic folklife that Hurston depicts for the readers.

The rich oral tradition [#3] reflected in African American folk life is revealed through the various towns people who congregate on the front porch of the Stark's general store. Through an Afrocentric analysis, teachers will be able to demonstrate the oral continuum in the rap songs, street poetry, and the 1930's style "dozen playing" that continues to flourish in African American communities throughout the diaspora[7]. The same "locker room lies" young men exchange on a daily basis in high schools [and colleges] across the

United States can be recognized in the oral antics of Eatonville's two comical characters, Hicks and Coker:

> "It takes money to feed pretty women. Dey gets ah lavish uh talk."
> "Not lak mine. Dey loves to hear me talk because dey can't understand it. Mah co-talkin' is too deep. Too much **co** to it."
> "Umph!"
> "You don't believe me, do yah? You don't know the women Ah kin git to mah command."
> "Umph!"
> "You ain' never seen me when ah'm out pleasurin' and givin' pleasure."
> "Umph!"
> "It's a good thing he married her befo' she seen me. Ah kin be some trouble when Ah take a notion."
> "Umph!"
> "Ah'm uh bitch's baby round lady people."
> "Ah's much ruther see all dat then hear 'bout it..." (p. 59)

The rhythm of this dialogue and various others in the story, as well as its call-and-response pattern, are reflections of the African aesthetic[8] [#4] synthesized and transformed in the diaspora. Other aspects of this rich oral tradition are also evident in the collective play-acting and "serious" speech-making occasions which are dramatized in the story. In one scene the "structured improvisation" element of the aesthetic is demonstrated when Tony attempted to give a speech to welcome the Starks to the Eatonville community. He was chastised by his friends for not including the "proper references" in his speech:

> "You can't welcome a man and his wife 'thout you make comparison to Isaac and Rebecca at the well, else it don't show de love between 'em if you don't."
>
> Everybody agreed that that was right. It was sort of pitiful for Tony not to know he couldn't make a speech without saying that. Some tittered at his ignorance. (p. 68)

Hurston wanted to make it clear that there was a special order and ethos to this unique African American community, one that embodied the collective spirit [#2 and #10] of its members. Janie was prevented from participating in this ethos because her husband had decided that it was too common for his wife. As an outsider, Janie was forced into a lonely existence in the midst of much joy and communal spirit. One possible literary interpretation which may be explored in the high school classroom was suggested by critic Houston Baker, who suggested that "Janie can be interpreted as a singer who (ontogenetically) recapitulates the blues experience of all black women treated as 'mules of the world.' She is, indeed, a member of a community of black women. And the expressiveness that she provides in her bleak situation in a racist South is equivalent to the song of sleepy John Estes . . ." (Baker, 1984: 86). In today's high school classrooms, students can compare and contrast the roles and images of women as depicted in the currently popular urban rap music. This could provide a basis for more relevant modern explorations of "womanist" [female-centered] themes reflected in the text.

Not until Joe Starks dies from a dysfunctional kidney, is Janie finally able to "let her hair down," both literally and figuratively, and become her own woman. She is no longer the young girl that ran off with Joe Starks so many years before, but she is a vibrant and handsome woman. When Vergible "Tea Cake" Woods saunters into Janie's store one afternoon and captures her long neglected heart and spirit, Janie's life is changed forever. Crabtree explained it best in the following passage:

> Tea Cake expands Janie's horizons literally and figuratively by transplanting her to the Everglades to mingle with other itinerant workers, as well as by simply encouraging her to determine her own work and to take part in the 'play'--the music, dancing and gaming-- of the workers in the 'muck'.
> (Crabtree, 1985: 57)

In Tea Cake, the handsome, black, fun-loving and sexually liberated young man who is ten years her junior, Janie at last has found the love of her life, as well as her own true self--the self that she has had to lock away for so many years. Hurston's vivid narration and figurative language can be readily understood by today's teens--"Janie looked down on him and felt a self-crushing love. So her soul crawled out from its hiding place" (p. 192). Hurston's figurative and poetic language reached even greater heights when she wrote the dialogue shared between Tea Cake and Janie. High school students, particularly females, with their appreciation for romance, will find these exchanges between this black man and woman particularly rewarding. They might even enjoy comparing this dialogue with the "romantic approaches" and raps they have had the opportunity to experience.

Down in the 'muck' of the Everglades, where the newlyweds, Janie and Tea Cake, go to find work, several other folk experiences and folk characters are portrayed. The reader is shown how African Americans have been able to survive in spite of the most miserable poverty and repression [#13]. Hurston vividly described the permanent transients who poured into the area to find work each picking season as:

> people ugly from ignorance and broken from being poor... All night long the jooks clanged and clamored. Pianos living three lifetimes in one. Blues made and used right on the spot. Dancing, fighting, singing, crying, laughing, winning and losing every hour. (p. 197)

These men and women work hard and play hard. They know no other realities. In the tragic flood scene which eventually pits mere mortals against the forces of nature, Hurston universalized her characters and their collective social experiences. At moments like these, when death seems to be most imminent, only the Supreme Being can provide the answers. This spiritual aspect of the African American folk experience [#10] is an ever-present element. Its roots can also be traced to the African continent, to the most ancient African civilization, where men and women were committed to living in harmony with nature and with God (Carruthers and Karenga, 1984) [#14 and #9]. As Janie and Tea Cake huddled together with their friends, drawing comfort from one another to wait out the storm, "they seemed to be staring at the dark, but **their eyes were watching God"** (p. 236).

Tea Cake's tragic death sends Janie back to Eatonville. They have shared a year and a half that has meant more to Janie than the previous forty years of her life. As she sits on her back porch, retelling her life story to her friend Pheoby, Janie's life has come full circle, and at last she is content, for she has found herself.

JAMES BALDWIN PREDICTS THE FIRE NEXT TIME

James Baldwin, although he was born in 1924, a generation after Hurston, and reared in Harlem, New York, he had no illusions about the racism, oppression and discrimination that engulfed the masses of Harlemites. Five years before he was born, W.E.B. DuBois, James Weldon Johnson and other leaders of the N.A.A.C.P. had led a mass demonstration of marchers through the streets of Harlem to protest the lynching and violence against African Americans that had become so common throughout the nation that the phrase "the Red Summer of 1919," had come into existence. As Baldwin grew up he was painfully aware of this aspect of his country's history, and he was also aware of other cultural and social realities that made life in the nation's urban centers less than pleasant for members of his race. By the time he celebrated his fifth birthday, the country had plunged into an economic depression that severely impacted the masses of African Americans that had already been struggling on the lowest rungs of the nation's economic ladder.

Like Hurston, Baldwin found refuge between the pages of the many books he read while helping his mother take care of his eight younger brothers and sisters. Throughout his early years he was often found with a child in one hand and a book in the other. The first book he read was Uncle Tom's Cabin, followed by numerous other works borrowed from the library on 135th Street, and "devoured as if they were some type of soul food" (Eckman, 1966: 16). The significance of reading as reflected in the lives of these two successful writers could be another topic for exploration in the classroom. Several careers options that also depend on a strong foundation in reading could be brought to the attention of the students.

Baldwin's stepfather, like Hurston's father, was a minister. He was also a man so controlled by psychological problems that he alienated the step-son that wanted so desperately to love him. The many years young James spent in the Pentecostal Church led him into the pulpit at the early age of 14 years. For three years, he preached in store front churches and gained a reputation for his powerful delivery and great skill in spreading the gospel. These years in the church also allowed Baldwin to escape from the sins of the streets that he feared would claim him and destroy his life as it had done so many of his neighbors and friends. The drugs, alcohol, easy sex, and crime were ever-present antidotes for the harsh realities that life in the North's urban ghettos represented. Students living in urban centers today will be able to assess the similarities and differences in their own lifestyles and that of the urban African Americans of a half a century ago; and what, if anything, have we learned from the past?

Both Hurston's and Baldwin's early connections with the church were natural [or perhaps unnatural] outgrowths of their lost African ancestral heritage. In this hazy realm of what Larry Neal termed their Race Memory, when African people created civilization, gave light to the world and built temples and pyramids in the Nile Valley [#14], their spirituality would have been the common denominator of their lives. As Hilliard (1984), Carruthers (1984), and Karenga (1984b) have demonstrated through their efforts to restore the Ancient Kemetic sacred texts, Baldwin and Hurston's life objectives at that time would have been to become "God-like" [#10]. In their "off-centered" realities in the African diaspora [U.S.A.], their spiritual educations still made very powerful impacts on their cosmology [#8], and this was reflected in their literary works.

Although Hurston migrated to Harlem's literary scene to develop her craft as a writer and to further her education, Baldwin believed he had to leave Harlem and the United States and move to Europe to be able to grow in his chosen field:

> It was November, 1948, Armistice Day... I left because I was a writer. I had discovered writing and I had a family to save. I had only one weapon to save them, my writing. And I couldn't write in the United States. (Gates, 1983: 594)

Baldwin left the United States in 1948, clutching his one-way ticket and vowing never to return to the land of his birth, but he did return again and again. James Baldwin became the major African

American literary voice of the following decades--the Civil Rights/Black Power era. Throughout these years he wrote for magazines, journals and newspapers, with high periods and low periods, but continuing to make a living from his writing as he grew in national and international renown. This voice, from the beginning to the end of his career, remained as angry, accusing and unrelenting, as Hurston's had been humorous and nonconfrontational. Baldwin was also very much like Hurston, for the circular motif, reflective of the African aesthetic [#4], could also typify the journey of his life.

In 1984, Baldwin had looked back over the sixty or so years of his life and reflected as follows on these early years of his career:

> I find it hard to re-create the journey . . . If I was trying to discover myself, on the whole, ... I was also trying to avoid myself. There was certainly, between that self and me, the accumulated rock of ages... a part of my inheritance. In order to claim my inheritance, it was necessary to challenge and claim the rock. Otherwise the rock claimed me... (Baldwin, 1984: xi).

Throughout this career Baldwin had reached back to his childhood years spent in the church to find images and inspiration for the burden he had chosen to lift. In accepting the inheritance--his birthright as an American of African descent, he was making it his personal job (or so it seemed at times) to "civilize" the white man who claimed to be the so-called "civilizer" of the world. Baldwin turned the tables and exposed the underside of the false myths and legends of absolute power and racial superiority that European American power-brokers continued to create in their attempts to dehumanize the African. Instead, their brutality, inhumanity and incivility was exposed over and over again by this African American writer; so that they, along with the rest of the world, could not forget it.

Hurston, with her high self-esteem and love for her people and their culture, had utilized the collective voice and folklore of African Americans to remind her fellow Americans that African peoples did have a voice of their own, a soul, a spirit, a mythology, a history, and a humanity that would not die or be denied no matter what economic, social, or political pressures they faced in life. James Baldwin did the very same thing, but he did it his way. His way was to use his enemy's own language, his own mythology, aesthetic, and religion to force him or her to recognize the African's humanity. Many different words have been used by various critics to describe Baldwin's use of the white man's idiom--forceful, clear, direct, accusatory, eloquent in its passion, logical, filled with fierce pride and dogged hope, clean, honest, logical, powerful, and angry--to name only a few. His personal success with this idiom speaks for itself. Claude Lewis, an old friend of Baldwin's, said it best when he wrote the following tribute shortly after the author's death in 1987:

> ...He was an unusually gifted and authentic writer and thinker, a permanent performer that America had produced despite its poisonous attitude toward blacks. **He was**, as it turned out, **a joke on racism.** (p. A-8)

Baldwin's first collection of essays, Notes of a Native Son (1984), had catapulted him into a reputation as the most valuable literary property in the country. He was riding the crest of his national (and international) popularity when he published The Fire Next Time (1964). He had been returning frequently from Paris to the land of his birth to support its ever-growing Civil Rights Movement, and becoming its official literary spokesperson. This collection of essays was viewed by many critics as another dimension of the African American's struggle for equal rights and justice under the law. Frederick Douglass had told his people many years earlier that, nothing would be gained by African Americans in this country without a struggle; Baldwin had merely added his own God-given gift of using his enemy's language as yet another weapon in his people's collective struggle.

As the nation and the world looked toward the violence, repression and protest actions which unveiled the core of American racism in the South, Baldwin's voice was heard reminding one and all that the North and its many urban ghettos were also extensions of this same disease.

Larry Neal and other youthful members of the Black Power and Black Nationalist Movements criticized Baldwin and others they considered to be part of the Negro establishment, for fighting for integration into the American mainstream. In a critical review of Baldwin's The Fire Next Time, Neal interpreted the author as follows:

> Baldwin's problem was that he was the conscience of a movement (civil rights) which has as its goal integration into a dying system, instead of the destruction of the white idea of the world. In The Fire Next Time, he begins to understand certain very basic things about black people in this society, the most important of which is that the only thing whites have that black people should want is power. (Neal, 1966: 60-61)

Neal considered Baldwin a failure for focusing on morality [#7] as the central issue of the American race problem. He felt that Baldwin was in a sense, a traitor to his people for not using the traditional aspects of African American culture to speak directly to black people, not for them, to their psychological and physical oppressor. It was not enough for this younger generation for Baldwin to remind whites that "fire" would destroy their world if they did not heed his warnings and make needed changes. Black Nationalists wanted him to go ahead and light the fire, not offer chances for redemption.

What Larry Neal and the others did not understand [and Afrocentric theory teaches us this] was that Baldwin's emphasis on morality and his constant struggle to find truth and justice were very much a part of their African tradition. These features of Baldwin's cosmology had a deeper structure and possibly an Ancient Kemetic source [#14]. In Kemet Afrocentricity and Knowledge, Asante explains the concept of Ma'at-- "a social, ethical, and rhetorical term that becomes a symbol of the search for existential peace and the central notion in the questing life" (1990: 88-91). Rightness, righteousness, justice and truth (morality) were all features of Ma'at. Baldwin's search for his identity could very well have been the same search for unity that his ancient ancestors in the Nile valley had struggled to attain thousands of years ago. This is a theory which could also be explored in a high school class discussion.

The Christian ethic that permeates his The Fire Next Time essays, also has a deeper structure. Karenga's and Carruther's translations of the ancient Kemetic sacred books reveal that all of the so-called great religions of the modern world--Christianity, Judaism, Muslim, etc.--borrowed tenets from this primary source of spiritual inspiration (Karenga, 1984, Carruthers, 1984). Baldwin could not truly be called a traitor to his race when his words were written to elevate all of humanity, even when his focus seemed to be the so-called "white oppressor."

Afrocentric historian C. Tsehloane Keto reminds us that the Afrocentric method offers a humanizing approach to social science:

> ...it is a self-disciplining perspective; it creates, on the one hand, a self-affirming criterion of values and, it embodies, on the other hand, a practical concern for the positive welfare of Africans and all of humanity. (Keto, 1989: 31)

Using a train metaphor to further develop this concept, Keto described African Americans as people on a station platform trying to convince the conductor of "Train America" that they are entitled to a seat on the approaching train. They become aware that the destination of that train is as important as a seat, especially if it is leading toward social disaster:

> to be true to their fellow travellers, to themselves and to what they have learned from their own history, they have a duty to raise questions about the final destination of train America, in short, they must play the part of social critics who exhort America to live up to its best ideals. (pp. 31-32)

James Baldwin had assumed this human/social responsibility for many years, and in spite of the bitterness and anger that threatened to overwhelm him, he never let that anger destroy his own humanity. This is a very important lesson that needs to be taught to today's youth, who must individually and collectively make many important decisions about the path they will follow in life. For those who are not blessed with an articulate father or uncle who can help them with these difficult decisions, Baldwin's first essay in The Fire Next Time, "My Dungeon Shook," written in the form of a loving and personal letter to his own nephew, will serve this purpose. Its powerful message is as needed today as it was when it was first written over a quarter of a century ago (1964). The letter can help African American, and other minority youth, understand that any injustices that may be inflicted against them, can only cause permanent damage if they accept them as just--"You can only be destroyed by believing that you really are what the white world calls a nigger" (p. 14) "No Justice, No Peace!", the slogan of the recent rebellion following the Rodney King incident in Southeast Los

Angeles, largely led by disillusioned urban youth who burned, looted, and violently expressed their anger and frustration over the perceived lack of justice, fairness, and equal opportunities for African Americans and other poor minorities in this wealthy country, is a strong indication of the need for the kind of lessons that Baldwin's seemly timeless essay will provide. It is quite possible that the "fires" of 1992 would not have occurred if Baldwin's contempories had listened to his warning.

Baldwin's essay will also explain to youths that knowing their history can help them understand that there is really no limit to where they can go in life. African American history demonstrates that it has been our love for one another that has carried us through past storms, and if we just remember the power of this collective force, we will be able to overcome all that we must face in the future. In a final massage to the members of the next generation Baldwin gave hope for the future when he wrote the following words: "...and now you must survive because we love you, and for the sake of your children and your children's children" (p. 17).

Both Hurston and Baldwin have left the world of the living, but their literary works [like the other "classic" African American texts frequently omitted from high school curriculums] remain as ancestral gifts which must be retrieved and passed on as literary legacies for African American, and other youth. (Holmes, 1993) To insure that the "circle not be broken," Afrocentric paradigms must be used to interpret this literature and to maintain the continuum into and beyond the 21st century. To fully understand and gain possible educational benefits from The Fire Next Time and

Their Eyes Were Watching God, teachers must help students understand the African American man and woman that wrote these books. To understand James Baldwin and Zora Neale Hurston, it is necessary to "locate" them as individuals within the broader historical and cultural context of the entire African experience. Afrocentric scholars remind us that this experience is even longer than human civilization. If any aspect of this long and collective Black experience will help today's youth find meaning in the complicated realities of the last decade of the twentieth century, teachers should not hesitate to use all aspects of it. Only then will it be possible to have "new visions of a liberated future," which will help to save the African American child.

NOTES

CHAPTER 7

[1] See Chapter 3, pp. 52-53 for a discussion of Edgar Allen Poe's racist writings. Also see Woodard, Fredrick and MacCann, Donnarae, "Huckleberry Finn and the Traditions of Blackface Minstrelsy;" and Gibson, Donald, "Mark Twain's Jim in the Classroom," both in The Black American in Books for Children. Woodard and MacCann, Eds., Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1985, pp. 75-109.

[2] In 1971, Darwin Turner was a forty year old African American Phi Beta Kappan with a BA and Masters degree from his home state's University of Cincinnati in Ohio. He had received a doctorate from the University of Chicago in 1956, taught at several African American colleges during the 1950's and 1960's, and was visiting professor at several white universities. The year following this publication (1971) Turner was appointed Professor of English and Director of the Afro-American Studies Program at the University of Iowa. He had numerous earlier publications in Language Arts and African American Literature when he co-authored this publication.

[3] Visions of a Liberated Future: Black Arts Movement Writings is the title of a collection of Larry Neal's critical essays, poetry and drama which was published by Thunder's Mouth Press (New York) eight years after his death, in 1989. The title of this dissertation ("**New** Visions of a Liberated Future"...) is another tribute to the example set by "poet-griot" Larry Neal and the struggle he gallantly waged during his short life time in the interest of black liberation

and the ultimate survival of future generations of continental and diasporan Africans.

[4] In my roll as Assistant Director of the Philadelphia School District's African American Studies Department, I worked with Dr. Traylor and her major sponsor, Philadelphia's Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum, to identify the teachers and secondary students who eventually participated in all phases of the cultural series. As a participant and/or coordinator, I personally witnessed each phase of the cultural series which continued in some form for the next five years. All quotes and accounts of the project were drawn from my personal correspondence with the project director, Dr. Eleanor Traylor, from the handouts given out at various activities, and from my personal notes. A full account of the Larry Neal Cultural Series was complied in an unpublished paper, "Larry Neal: The Man, The Message, and The Mission," which I wrote in December, 1988, as a term paper for Dr. Molefi K. Asante's premier graduate Proseminar class (#AA 400) in the PhD program he had initiated that semester in Temple University.

[5] The significance of rap as a "transnational expressive cultural form" and an educational opportunity for teachers was discussed in the interview with Houston Baker, Jr. which appeared in the April 23, 1992, Black Issues In Higher Education. Vol. 9, No.4, 12-17, 22, and 27. For additional background, historical and cultural information on the African American art form known as "rap music," see James Spady's Nation Conscious Rap. New York and Philadelphia: P.C. International, 1991; David Toop's The Rap Attack: African Jive to New York Hip Hop. London: Pluto Press, 1984, or

Boston: South End Press, 1984; Nelson George's Stop the Violence: Overcoming Self-Destruction. New York: Pantheon Books, 1990; Cheryl L. Keys' "Verbal Art Performance in Rap Music: The Conversation of the 80's," Folklore Forum, 17 (Fall 1984); and Patricia Hicks' "The Relationship Between an Oral Rhythmic Style of Communication (Rap) and Learning in the Urban Pre-School," ERIC, 1987, ED283200.

[6] "Reassessing African American Literature Through an Afrocentric Paradigm," is also the title of a chapter I wrote for the book, Language and Literature in the African American Imagination, edited by Carol A. Blackshire-Belay. The publication is expected to be released by Greenwood Press in 1993. Some of the same literary observations and instructional techniques were explored in this chapter.

[7] See the same references listed in note 5.

[8] For a discussion of the various elements of the African aesthetic see Molefi K. Asante and Kariamu Welsh-Asante, Eds., African Culture: The Rhythms of Unity. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1990; and Kariamu Welsh-Asante, Ed. The African Aesthetic: Keeper of the Tradition. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993.

CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Black Power/Black Arts Movement of the 1960's produced a group consciousness, an intellectual awakening, and a collective voice in the African American community which demanded changes in the social, economic, and political fabric of American society. All educational arenas in the nation, from colleges and universities to secondary and elementary schools, were strongly impacted by this movement and its repeated challenges for changes in the delivery of education to African American children. A commonly emphasized agenda of the African American community was the need to save African American children from the "mis-education" (Woodson, 1933) they had received for centuries in traditional American classrooms.

A broad overview of pedagogical literature published in books and other educational, psychological, and sociological professional journals, since the turbulent 1960's, documents the numerous efforts made to address the educational strengths, deficits, and/or needs of African American students. Most issues considered important in educating the black child have been researched, and several evaluations and prescriptions for change have been outlined for professional educators and for the general public. This pedagogical literature also reveals that the same critical issues raised by proponents of the Black Power/Black Arts Movement--the importance of Afrocentric consciousness and African cultural and aesthetic references--were interfaced throughout the recommendations offered for addressing the educational needs of African American children. It was apparent that the messages voiced by leaders of the Black Power/Black Arts Movement, such as Stokeley Carmichael, Charles Hamilton, Hoyt Fuller, Larry Neal, Addison Gayle and many others, did not simply fade away in the African American community when the rest of the nation changed its agenda and used the national media to highlight other social, cultural, and political issues considered more important in the late 1970's, 80's, and 90's. Individually and collectively within common interest groups [i.e., associations of African American writers, librarians, English teachers, psychologists, sociologists, and education administrators], committed scholars and educators recognized the need to continue searching for answers to the problems they and their children faced in this historically racist society. The challenges offered by leading Black Nationalists were accepted by many, as they began to look to their African past and their cultural and spiritual ethos for the direction and strength necessary to effect changes that would produce empowerment and liberation for African American children and adults.

The evolving Afrocentric theory and method, led by various scholars who, like the Black Nationalists in the Black Power/Arts Movement, wished to address the needs and aspirations of African peoples; clarified the additional necessity of "transforming human reality by ushering in a human openness to cultural pluralism which can not exist without the unlocking of the minds for acceptance of an expansion of consciousness" (Asante, 1990: v). This much more expansive and humanistic intellectual vision served as a potent motivator for those educators who were committed to the liberation and empowerment of African American children and adults, but at the same time, recognized the needs of other cultural and ethnic groups in our pluralistic society. The current drive for a more inclusive multi-cultural instructional approach in American elementary, secondary, and university classrooms, can be viewed as a long over-due national response to the continued promulgation of Afrocentric theory and methodology. This theory challenged the hegemony which typified the traditional Eurocentric instructional approach found at all educational levels in American society. If the African American child should be taught from his/her own historical and cultural center, all other groups in America educationally short-changed in the past, had the same right and need.

Continued pronouncements of dire statistics in professional journals and negative assessments in the popular media about the educational deficits and overall well-being of the vast majority of African American children throughout this nation, particularly young black males in the nation's urban centers, reinforces the need for an immediate application of some of these prescriptions for change. The study presented in this dissertation is an effort to apply some of this research and move the educational agenda of African American children beyond the so-called traditional "mis-education" which leads to unacceptable results in the classroom and in life. By focusing on literature for elementary, middle and high school students, three models of instruction for "a curriculum of survival and beyond" [dissertation title] have been presented. Each instructional model was grounded in Afrocentric theory, and shaped by the paradigms and prescriptions for change which were extracted from selected pedagogical literature of the past twenty-five years.

To properly assess the African American literature which is currently available for use in elementary and secondary classrooms, Afrocentric methodology was used in the second phase of this three-part study by looking within the African past for guidelines to interpret the present and shape the future reality of African American children and young adults. A general overview of the evolution of the African American literary tradition within American society, including the key voices which directed this tradition, was presented as a prelude to the conscious creation of Afrocentric literature to address the needs of African American children. Hopefully, this literature would counteract the psychological damage caused by the racist and repressive American and European literary traditions which often caricatured and distorted the history and culture of African peoples. The major African American voices which emerged from the struggle to shape this component of the black literary tradition were also identified and discussed in the second part of the study.

In the final part of the study (Chapters 5, 6, and 7) the writings of prize-winning African American authors of literature for children (pre-k through 4th grade), middle level students (5th through 8th grade), and young adult readers (9th through 12th grade) were critiqued to determine the presence of Afrocentric concepts, issues and paradigms which were also reflected in the pedagogical literature published since the 1960's to address the deficits, strengths, and needs of African American children. The main objective was to assess the instructional value of the collective and individual writings of a particular author for enhancing curricular offerings for African American and other children in American classrooms. These critiques demonstrated that Afrocentric concepts suitable for building self-esteem, pride, strong family values, and cultural continuity had been included at each instructional level, and could be used as the basis for lesson planning in the classroom. Picture books, biographies, and poetry by Eloise Greenfield, teen and pre-teen adventure stories by Walter Dean Myers, as well as mature fiction and essays by Zora Neale Hurston and James Baldwin each contained several of the Afrocentric paradigms reflected in the pedagogical literature. The one common factor in each book discussed was the personal commitment, stated and/or implied by individual authors, to use their art to demonstrate and reflect the historical and cultural strengths of their people. With the literature written specifically for children, such as the writings of Eloise Greenfield and Walter Dean Myers, the authors were located to determine their centrism within African and African American History and culture. Both prize-winning authors had repeatedly expressed their personal commitment to the collective black agenda of "saving the African American child," and providing him and her with literary weapons to combat racism, sexism, classism, and all other barriers to their individual growth and development and their collective racial empowerment. In other words, these authors [like many of their colleagues who participated in the first national conference of Black Writers in 1974] had made commitments to continue the struggle initiated by various leaders from the African American past, such as W. E. B. DuBois, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Carter G. Woodsen, Mary McCloud Bethune, and literary greats like Zora Neale Hurston and James Baldwin. This same struggle was redefined and continued by the leaders of the Black Power/Black Arts Movement of the 1960's who recognized the necessity of changing strategies to accomplish this collective goal of African American people.

Although Black Nationalist ideology and jargon prevalent in the literature of the early and late 1960's became less common in the African American academic and artistic communities, the goals of black survival and the rescue and reconstruction of the historical, cultural, and psychological dimensions of the African past became major components of Afrocentric theory and methodology as delineated by certain scholars who have identified themselves as proponents of this concept. In spite of numerous efforts to challenge its tenets and proponents, Afrocentricity is viewed by the African American community as a major weapon in the struggle to improve the education of the African American child (Baker, 1992). It is also recognized by a large segment of this community as the most promising pathway to empowerment and liberation for African children and adults.

NEED FOR FURTHER STUDY

This study has demonstrated that specific issues raised during the Black Power/Black Arts Movement of the 1960's in the attempts of African Americans to empower and liberate their people were subsequently reflected in the pedagogical literature published to address the educational status and/or instructional needs of African American children. Additionally, the study demonstrated that there was an increasing Afrocentric consciousness reflected in the writings of African American creative writers and education change-agents of the past two decades. Afrocentric paradigms drawn from the pedagogical literature [numbered 1-15] were also found in the creative literature for children and adults written by authors who placed African peoples at the center or core of their discourse. What impact this will or will not make in addressing the future educational needs and deficits of black children must be determined by further studies and applications of past research. Whether or not these same concepts, models, or theories are reflected in other areas of the elementary and secondary curriculum, such as mathematics, science and technology, health, and career education; or how this knowledge could be used to enhance instruction in subject areas other than literature must also be determined through additional research.

The bibliographies and lists included in the appendices were provided to support future studies of the black literary tradition, and the continued application of the evaluative and critical techniques used to explore the individual and collective writings of children's authors Eloise Greenfield and Walter Dean Myers; and the individual texts [Their Eyes Were Watching God and The Fire Next Time] of Zora Neale Hurston and James Baldwin. Although each of these authors has been recognized for their fine literary skill, they are only four of many African American men and women who have used their pens as weapons over the past three centuries to support their people's collective struggle for power and liberation. Their work should be critiqued as well.

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APPENDIX A

CORETTA SCOTT KING AWARD WINNERS
1970-1992

Selection Criteria: The award, which is presented by the *American Library Association's Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) Coretta Scott King Task Force,* commemorates the life and work of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and honors Mrs. Coretta Scott King for her courage and determination in continuing to work for peace and world brotherhood. This award is made to one African American author and one African American illustrator for outstandingly inspirational contributions which promote an understanding and appreciation of all cultures. The author and illustrator need not necessarily be associated with the same book. Joint authors and joint illustrators are also eligible.

The books to which the award is given:

a. must be appealing to children and/or young adults.
b. must portray people, places, things, and events in a manner sensitive to the true worth and value of all beings.
c. must be published in the calendar year preceding the year of the award presentation.
d. may be either fiction or non-fiction.

1970	Lillie Patterson. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: Man of Peace (Garrard)
1971	Charlemae Rollins. Black Troubador: Langston Hughes (Rand McNally)
1972	Elton C. Fax. 17 Black Artists (Dodd, Mead)
1973	Alfred Duckett. I Never Had it Made: The Autobiography Jackie Robinson (Putnan)
1974	Sharon Bell Mathis. George Ford, Illustrator. Ray Charles (Crowell

1975	Dorothy Robinson & Herbert Temple, Illustrator. The Legend of Africania (Johnson)
1976	Pearl Bailey. Duey's Tale (Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovich)
1977	James Haskins. The Story of Stevie Wonder (Lothrop, Lee & Shepard)
1978	Eloise Greenfield & Carole Byard, Illustrator. African Dream (A John Day Book by Crowell)
1979	Ossie Davis. Escape to Freedom (Viking) Tom Feeling, Illustrator. Something on My Mind, words by Nikki Grimes (Dial)
1980	Walter Dean Myers. Young Landlords (Viking) Carole Byard, Illustrator. Cornrows by Camille Yarbrough (Coward, McCann & Geoghegan)
1981	Sidney Poitier. This Life (Alfred A. Knopf) Ashley Bryan, Illustrator. Beat the Story Drum, Pum Pum (Atheneum)
1982	Mildred Taylor. Let The Circle Be Unbroken (Dial) John Steptoe, Illustrator. Mother Crocodile by Birago Diop; translated and adapted by Rosa Guy (Delacorte)
1983	Virginia Hamilton. Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush (Philomel) Peter Magubane, Illustrator. Black Child (Alfred A. Knopf)
1984	Lucille Clifton. Everett Anderson's Goodbye (Holt, Rinehart and Winston) Pat Cummings, Illustrator. My Mama Needs Me by Mildred Pitts Walter (Lothrop, Lee & Shepard) Special Citation to Mrs Coretta Scott King for The Words of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Newmarket)

1985	Walter Dean Myers. Motown and Didi (Viking)
1986	Virgina Hamilton. The People could Fly: American Black Folktales (knopf)
1987	Mildred Pitts Walter. Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World (Lothrop), Illustrator Jerry Pinkey. Half a Moon and One Whole Star, text by Crescent Dragonwagon (Macmillan)
1988	Mildred D, Taylor. The Friendship (Dial), Illustrator John Steptoe. Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale (Lothrop)
1989	Walter Dean Myers. Fallen Angels (Scholastic), Illustrator Jerry Pinkney. Mirandy and Brother Wind, text by Patricia C. McKissack (Knopf)
1990	Patricia McKissack and Fredrick McKissack. A Long Hard Journey: The Story of the Pullman Porter (Walker); illustrator Jan S. Gilchrist for Nathaniel Talking (Writers & Readers), written by Eloise Greenfield
1991	Mildred D. Taylor. The Road to Memphis (Dial); Leo and Diane Dillon, illustrators of Aida, told from the Giuseppe Verdi opera by Leontyne Price (Gulliver Books, Harcourt Brace Janovich), edited by Bonnie Engber
1992	Walter Dean Myers. Now Is the Time (Harper Collins) Faith Ringgold, Illustrator. Tar Beach (Crown)

CORETTA SCOTT KING HONORABLE MENTION BOOKS

(*) Indicates that books in the Honorable Mention category were not selected for these years.

1970*	
1971	Maya Angelou. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (Random House) Shirley Chisholm. Unbought and Unbossed (Houghton Mifflin) Mari Evans. I Am a Black Women (Morrow) Lorenz Graham. Every Man Heart Lay Down (Crowell) June Jordan & Terri Bush. The Voice of the Children (Holt, Rinehart & Winston) Grossman, Gloom, and Bible. Black Means... (Hill & Wang) Janice M. Udry. Mary Jo's Grandmother (Whitman) Margaret Peters. The Ebony Book of Black Achievement (Johnson)
1972*	
1973*	
1974	Louise Crane. Ms. Africa: Profiles of Modern African Women (Lippincott) Alice Childress. A Hero Ain't Nothin But a Sandwich (McCann & Geoghegan) Lucille Clifton. Don't You Remember? Illustrated by Evaline Ness (Dutton) John Nagenda. Mukasa. Illustrated by Charles Lily (Macmillan) Kristin Hunter. Guests in the Promised Land (Scribner)
1975*	
1976	Shirley Graham. Julius Nyerere: Teacher of Africa (Messner) Walter Dean Myers. Fast Sam, Cool Clyde and Stuff (Viking)

CORETTA SCOTT KING
HONORABLE MENTION BOOKS

(*) Indicates that books in the Honorable Mention category were not selected for these years.

1970*	
1971	Maya Angelou. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (Random House) Shirley Chisholm. Unbought and Unbossed (Houghton Mifflin) Mari Evans. I Am a Black Women (Morrow) Lorenz Graham. Every Man Heart Lay Down (Crowell) June Jordan & Terri Bush. The Voice of the Children (Holt, Rinehart & Winston) Grossman, Gloom, and Bible. Black Means... (Hill & Wang) Janice M. Udry. Mary Jo's Grandmother (Whitman) Margaret Peters. The Ebony Book of Black Achievement (Johnson)
1972*	
1973*	
1974	Louise Crane. Ms. Africa: Profiles of Modern African Women (Lippincott) Alice Childress. A Hero Ain't Nothin But a Sandwich (McCann & Geoghegan) Lucille Clifton. Don't You Remember? Illustrated by Evaline Ness (Dutton) John Nagenda. Mukasa. Illustrated by Charles Lily (Macmillan) Kristin Hunter. Guests in the Promised Land (Scribner)
1975*	
1976	Shirley Graham. Julius Nyerere: Teacher of Africa (Messner) Walter Dean Myers. Fast Sam, Cool Clyde and Stuff (Viking)

Mildred D. Taylor. *Song of the Trees* (Dial)
Eloise Greenfield. *Paul Robeson*. Illustrated by George Ford (Crowell)

1977 Lucille Clifton. *Everett Anderson's Friend*. Illustrated by Ann Grifalconi (Holt, Rinehart & Winston)
Clarence Blake & Donald Martin. *Quiz Book on Black America* (Houghton Mifflin)
The Editors of Franklin Watts. *Encyclopedia of Africa* (Franklin Watts)
Mildred D. Taylor. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Dial)

1978 James Haskins. *Barbara Jordan* (Dial)
Lillie Patterson. *Coretta Scott King* (Garrard)
William J. Faulkner. *The Days When the Animals Talked: Black Folkales and How They Came to Be* (Follett)
Eloise Greenfield. *Mary McLeod Bethune* (Harper & Row)
Ruth A. Stewart. *Portia: The Life of Postia Washington Pittman, the Daughter of Booker T. Washington* (Doubleday)
Francina Glass. *Marvin and Tige* (St. Martins Press)

1979 Carol Fenner. *Skates of Uncle Remus* (Random House)
Nikki Grimes & Tom Feelings. *Something on My Mind* (Dial)
Virginia Hamilton. *Justice and Her Brothers* (Greenwillow)
Lillie Patterson. *Benjamin Banneker* (Abingdon)
Jeanne Patterson. *I Have a Sister, My Sister is Deaf* (Harper & Row)

1980 Eloise Greenfield & Lessie J. Little. *Childtimes: A Three-Generation Memoir* (Harper & Row)
Berry Gordy. *Movin' Up* (Harper & Row)
James Haskins. Andrew Young: *Man with a Mission* (Lothrop, Lee & Shepard)
Ellease Southerland. *Let the Lion Eat Straw* (Scribner)

1980 James Haskins. *James Van Der Zee: The Picture-Takin' Man* (Dodd, Mead)

1981	Alexis Deveaux. Don't Explain: A Song of Bllie Holiday (Harper & Row) Carole Byard, Illustrator. Grandma's Joy by Eloise Greenfield (Philomel) Jerry Pinkney, Illustrator. Count on Your Fingers: African Style by Claudia Zaslavsky (Crowell)
1982	Alice Childress. Rainbow Jordon (Coward, McCann & Geoghegan) Kristin Hunter. Lou in the Limelight (Scribner) Mary E. Mebane. Mary (Viking) Tom Feelings, illustrator. Daydreamers by Eloise Greenfield (Dial)
1983	Julius Lester. This Strange New Feeling (Dial) Ashley Bryan. I'm Going to Sing: Black American Spirituals, Vol. II (Atheneum) Pat Cummings, Illustrator. Just Us Women by Jeannette Caines (Harper & Row) John Steptoe, Illustrator. All the Colors of the Race by Arnold Adoff (Morrow)
1984	Virgina Hamilton. The Magical Adventure of Pretty Pearl Harper & Row) James Haskins. Lena Horne (Coward, McCann) Joyce Carol Thomas. Bright Shadow (Avon) Mildred Pitts Walter. Because We Are (Lothrop, Lee & Shepard)
1985	Virgina Hamilton. Little Love (Philomel) Candy Dawson Boyd. The Circle of Gold (Apple/ Scholastic)
1986	Virgina Hamilton. Junius Over Far (Harper) Mildred Pitts Walter. Trouble's Child (Lothrop)
1987	Ashley Bryan (text and illustration). Lion and the Ostrich Chicks and Other African Folk Tales (Atheneum) Joyce Hansen. Which Way Freedom? (Walker) Pat Cummings, illustrator. CLOUDS (Lothrop)

1988	Ashley Bryan, illustrator. What a Morning! The Christmas Story in Black Spirituals, selected by John Langstaff (Margaret K. McElderry) Joe Sam, illistrator. The Invisible Hunters: a Legend from the Miskito Indians of Nicaragua, compiled by Harriet Rohmer (Children's Book Press)
1989	James Berry. A Thief in the Village and Other Stories (Orchard) Virginia Hamilton. Anthony Burns: The Defeat and Triumph of a Fugutive Slave (Knopf) Amos Ferguson, illustrator. Under the Sunday Tree, text by Eloise Greenfield (Harper) Pat Cummings, illustrator. Storm in the Night, text by Mary Stolz (Harper)
1990	Eloise Greenfield. Nathaniel Talking (Black Butterfly Children's Books) Virginia Hamilton. The Bells of Christmas (Harcourt) Lillie Patterson. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Freedom Movement (Facts on File) Jerry Pinkney, illustrator. The Talking Eggs, text by Robert D. San Souci (Dial)
1991	James Haskins. Black Dance in America: A History Through Its People (Crowell) Angela Johnson. When I Am Old With You (Orchard)
1992	Eloise Greenfield. Night on Neighbor Street, (Dial) Ashley Bryan, illustrator. All Night all Day, (Atheneum)

APPENDIX B

BLACK AUTHORS, ILLUSTRATORS, AND PUBLISHERS OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS

AUTHORS

Abdul, Raoul
Achebe, Chinua
Arkhurst, Joyce
Asare, Meshack
Baker, Augusta
Bennett, Lerone, Jr.
Bontemps, Arna
Boyd, Candy Dawson
Brawley, Benjamin
Breinburg, Petronella
Brooks, Gwendolyn
Brown, Virginia Suggs
Bryan, Ashley
Burroughs, Margaret Taylor G.
Caines, Jeanette Franklin
Campbell, Barbara
Carew, Jan Rynveld
Carter, Mary Kennedy
Carthy, Wilfred
Cheatham, K. Follis
Chesnutt, Charles Waddell
Childress, Alice
Clifton, Lucille
Cornish, Sam
Cullen, Countee
Davenport-Powell, Darla
Davis, Ossie
Deveaux, Alexis
Diop, Birago
Dunbar, Paul Laurence
Edwards, Audrey
Egypt, Ophelia Settle
Emecheta, Buchi
Evans, Mari
Fauset, Jessie
Fax, Elton
Feelings, Muriel
Flournoy, Valerie R.
Fufuka, Karama
Gayle, Addison

Giovanni, Nikki
Graham, Lorenz
Graham, Shirley Lola
Greenfield, Eloise
Griffin, Judith Berry
Grimes, Nikki
Guirma, Frederic
Guy, Rosa
Hamilton, Virginia Esther
Hansen, Joyce W.
Haskins, James S.
Hill, Charlotte
Howard, Moses Leon
Hudson, Cheryl Willis
Hudson, Wade
Hughes, Langston
Humphrey, Margo
Hunter, Kristin
Hurmence, Belinda
Jackson, Jesse
Johnson, James Weldon
Jordan, June
Karame, Fufuka
King, Coretta Scott
Kirkpatrick, Oliver Austin
Lawrence, Jacob
Lester, Julius
Lilly, Charles
Little, Lessie Jones
Lloyd, Errol
Lynch, Lorenzo
Madhubuti, Safisha
Mathis, Sharon Bell
McKissack, Frederick
McKissack, Patricia
Medearis, Angela Shelf
Meriwether, Louise M.
Millender, Dharathula
Miller, Don
Moore, Carman Leroy
Moore, Emily R.
Musgrove, Margaret
Myers, Walter Dean
Obadiah
Ottley, Roi
Palmer, Cyril Everard
Patterson, Lillie G.
Petry, Ann
Prather, Ray
Quarles, Benjamin
Revis, Alesia
Robinet, Harriette
Robinson, Adjai
Robinson, Louie, Jr.

AUTHORS

- Rollins, Charlemae
- Rollick, Barbara
- Ruffins, Reynold
- Salkey, Felix Andrew
- Serwadda, William Moses
- Moore, Carmen Leroy
- Shearer, John
- Sherlock, Hilary
- Steptoe, John E.
- Sutherland, Efua
- Tarry, Ellen
- Tate, Eleanora E.
- Taulbert, Clifton
- Taylor, Mildred D.
- Thomas, Dawn C.
- Thomas, Joyce Carol
- Thomas, Lanthe
- Turner, Glennette
- Walker, Alice
- Walter, Mildred Pitts
- Washington, Booker T.
- White, Edgar, B.
- Wilkinson, Brenda Scott
- Wilson, Beth
- Woodson, Carter Godwin
- Yarbrough, Camille
- Young, Andrew S. Nash
- Young, Bernice Elizabeth

BLACK ILLUSTRATORS

- Asare, Meshack
- Barnett, Moneta
- Bearden, Romare
- Bible, Charles
- Bryan, Ashley
- Bayard, Carole
- Carty, Leo
- Crews, Donald
- Crichlow, Ernest
- Cummings, Pat. Marie
- Depillards, Murry N.
- Dillion, Dianne
- Dillion, Leo
- Fax, Elton
- Feelings, Tom
- Ferguson, Amos
- Ford, George
- Fufuka, Mahri
- Gilchrist, Jan S.
- Greenfield, Eloise
- Grifalconi, Ann

- Guirma, Frederic
- Hudson, Cheryl Willis
- Jefferson, Sharon
- Jenkins, Maurice
- Lawrence, Jacobs
- Lily, Charles
- LLoyd, Errol
- Lynch, Lorenzo
- Magubane, Peter
- McCannon, Dindga
- Miller, Don
- Ness, Evaline
- Parks, Gordon Jr.
- Pinkey, Jerry
- Pinkey, J. Brian
- Prather, Ray
- Ruffins, Reynold
- Sam, Joe
- Steptoe, John
- Temple, Herbert
- Wesley, Valerie Wilson

BLACK PUBLISHERS

- Africa World Press
- African-American Images
- Black Butterfly Press
- Black Classic Press
- Charill Publications
- Empak Publications
- Johnson Publishing Co.
- Just Us Books
- Maral Enterprises
- Red Sea Press
- Third World Press

APPENDIX C

SELECTED BOOKS OF AFRICA FOR CHILDREN

Title	Author	Year
A Glorious Age in Africa	D. Chu and E. Skinner	1990
A Road Down to the Sea	Liberian Folk Tale	1971
The Adventures of Torti: Tales From West Africa	O. Ugorji	1972
A Family in Kenya	Michael Griffin	1988
Aesop: Tales of Aethiop the African	J. Korman	1974
Africa	F. Sabin	1985
Africa and the Origins of Humans	Raintree Publications	1988
Africa: A Glance at an Amazing Continent	Ayanna Zareef	1989
Africa Dream	Eloise Greenfield	1977
African Heros	Naomi Mitchison	1969
African Folktales	Roger D. Abraham	1982
African Proverbs	Compiled by Charlott and Wolf Leslau	1962
Afro-Bets First Book About Africa	Veronica Ellis	1990

Aida	Leontyne Price	1990
Amoko and Efua Bear	Sonia Appiah	1989
Along the Niger River: An African Way of Life	Aylette Jenness	1974
Anansi the Spider: a Tale from the Ashanti	Adaped by Gerald Mcdermott	1972
The Road to Bethlehem: An Ethiopian Nativity	Adapted by Elizabeth Laird	1987
Animal Fables and Other Tales Retold: African Tales in the New World	Enid D'Oyley	1989
Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions	Margaret Musgrove	1976
The Baby Leopard	Linda and Clay Goss	1989
Beat the Story Drum, Pum-Pum	Ashley Bryan	1980
Black Presence in the Lands of the Bible	Daud Watts	1991
Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain: A Nandi Tale	Retold by Verna Aardema	1981
Book of African Names	Chief Osuntoki	1970
Count on your Fingers African Style	Claudia Zaslavsky	1980
Count Your Way Through Africa	James Haskins	1989
The Cow-Tail Switch and Other West African Stories	Courlander/Herzog	1947

David He No Fear	Lorenz B. Graham	1971
Desmond Tutu: Bishop of Peace	Carol Green	1986
Discovering Tut-ankh-Amen's Tomb	Shirley Glubok	1968
Every Man Heart Lay	Lorenz B. Graham	1971
The First Morning, an African Myth	Margery Bernstein & Janet Kobrin	1976
Fourteen Hundred Cowries, and Other African Tales	Abayomi Fuja	1971
Gifts of the Nile Valley	Daud Watts	1986
How Many Spots Does a Leopard Have	Julius Lester	1989
How Tables Came To Umu Madu	T. O. Echewa	1989
I Am Eyes	Leila Ward	1987
Jafta	Hugh Lewin	1983
Jafta: The Journey	Hugh Lewin	1984
Jafta: The Town	Hugh Lewin	1984
Jafta's Mother	Hugh Lewin	1983
Jambo Means Hello	Muriel Feelings	1974
The Leopard	Cecil Bodker	1975
The King's Drum and Other African Stories	Harold Courtlander	1962
The Lion's Tail	Douglas F. Taylor	1980

Lord of the Dance	Veronique Tadjo	1989
Me and Neesie	Eloise Greenfield	1975
Moja Means One	Muriel and Tom Feeling	1972
Mummies Made in Egypt	Aliki	1987
Nelson Mandela: A Voice Set Free	Rebecca Stefoff	1990
Oh, Kojo! How Could You!	*Verna Aardema*	1988
Olode the Hunter, and Other Tales from Nigeria	Harold Courlander & Ezekiel A Eshugbay	1968
Osa's Price	Ann Grifalconni	1990
The 100,000 Horsemen of West Africa	Daud Watts	1986
The Ox of the Wonderful Horns, and Other African Folktales	Ashley Bryan	1971
Priness of the Full Moon	Frederic Guirma	1970
Roots of Time: A Portrait of African Life and Culture	M. Jefferson & E. Skinner	1984
Shaka King of Zulus	Diane Stanley and Peter Vennema	1988
Song of the Boat	Lorenz B. Graham	1975
Songs and stories Uganda	Moses W. Serwadda	1974

Sundiata: The Epic of the Lion King	Retold by Roland Bertol	1971
The Tale of the Two Brothers: an Egyptian Fairy Tale	Charles E. Moldenke	1988
Tales of the Land of Death	Ucheokeke	1971
The Tortoise and the Tree	Jania Domanska	1978
Tower To Heaven	Ruby Dee	1991
Timbuktu	Daud Watts	1986
The Urban Heritage of West Africa	Daud Watts	1987
Your History: From the Beginnings of Time to the Present	J. A. Rogers	1983
What's So Funny, Ketu	Verna Aardema	1982
Who's in Rabbit's House	Verna Aardema	1977
Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears: A West African Tale	Retold by Verna Aardema	1974
Why the Sun and the Moon Live in the Sky; an African Folktale	Elphinstone Dayrell	1968
Winnie Mandela: The Soul of Africa	Milton Meltzer	1987
Zekmet: The Stone Carver	Mary Stoltz	1988

APPENDIX D

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BLACK HISTORY AND CULTURE FOR MATURE READERS

(Upper Secondary Grades and Adults)

Agebodeka, F. The Rise of the Nation States: A History of West African Peoples.1600-1964. Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd.: London, 1965.

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ben-Jochannan, Yosef. African Origins of the Major "Western Religions." Alkebu-lan Books, c/o Dr. Arthur Lewis, 725 St. Nicholas Ave., New York, 10030, 1970.

ben-Jochannan, Yosef. Black Men of the Nile and His Family. Alkebu-lan Books, c/o Dr. Arthur Lewis, 725 St., Nicholas Ave., New York, 10030, 1972.

________________. Africa: Mother of Western Civilization. Alkebu-lan Books, c/o Dr. Arthur Lewis, 725 St., Nicholas Ave., New York, 10030, 1972.

________________ . Black Man of the Nile and His Family. Alkebu-lan Books: Brunswick, New Jersey, 1972.

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________________. The Shaping of Black America. Johnson Publishing Co.: Chicago, 1975 .

________________. Wade in the Water: Great Moments in Black History, Johnson Publishing Co., Chicago,

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Cohen, Daniel. Shaka: King of the Zulus, a Biography. Doubleday and Co.: New York, 1973.

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______________. Can Africa Survive? The Search for a New Society. Atlantic-Little, Brown, Co.: Boston, 1974.

______________. The Lost Cities of Africa. Atlantic-Little, Brown, Co.: Boston, Mass., 1959.

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APPENDIX E

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